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THE

MELVILLES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"JOHN DRAYTON."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE MELVILLES.

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Melville stands at the parlour window, looking out somewhat anxiously. The square table is covered for dinner, and Morris Elias' receipt for the rent lies upon the table-cloth. It is nearly three o'clock in the afternoon; and Isabella, who sits near the window sewing, lays down her work every now and then, to hasten to the door,

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and gaze down the street; for Hugh has not yet returned from laying siege to Mr. Goudie, along with his powerful uncle.

They are alone in the house, for Mrs. Melville is not bold enough to re-engage Jane, until Hugh is assured of employment; and the basket of work stands on one chair by the window, while Isabella has been seated on the other; but little sewing has been done to-day; there is so much to remember about uncle Quentin—so much to anticipate for Hugh.

And now he comes up the street, with a quick elastic step, joyously greeting the expectant eyes of his mother at the window, and his sister at the open door. He has had more actual fatigue to-day, than he had yesterday, yet how differently he looks—with what a glow of fresh activity and enterprise,

taking the place of the languid, forlorn weariness with which he came in only twenty-four hours ago! To-day, he has all the vigour of hope to sustain him; yesterday, his state of mind was not sufficiently active to be called despair—it was rather the dreary blank of hopelessness.

As he enters, their anxious eyes turn to him wistfully again; and again his mother asks: "Well, Hugh?"

"Well, mother, everything is in train: it is not so easy to refuse my uncle, as it was to refuse us; and I think I am almost sure of a situation immediately—a situation of a hundred a-year."

The widow turned away her head, overcome, to wipe the tears from her cheek, and give thanks to God.

Poor Hugh! he sat down in his father's

arm-chair, and almost sobbed; for the joy brought the grief back again, as he remembered that now he could take his father's place.

"Where is it? Is it in Mr. Goudie's, Hugh?" asked Isabella, after a pause.

"No; it is in another East India house, to which my uncle had an introduction. You should have seen how they received him, mother!—and my education stood me in stead; for the principal partner, Mr. Renshaw, wants somebody who can help him with his correspondence. The firm is Renshaw, Brownlow and Co.; a very respectable house; and if I get this situation, it will bring me into immediate contact with the principals. It is something to be Mr. Greenlees' nephew; and I suspect Mr. Renshaw will need no small assistance in his French

letters. So don't be too sure, that I may not be a Liverpool merchant yet."

"Ah, Hugh! but your essay?" said Isabella.

For Hugh's last essay on things in general had not been particularly favourable to the Liverpool merchant.

"I forgot my essay. Well, when I belong to the class myself, I will become a reformer, you know. That won't do either, mother. I see what you mean. No, I will not lose sight of my profession; but there must be money enough spared first, to finish my studies, and that must be worked for at the present time. I am to go to the office to-morrow to get Mr. Renshaw's conclusive answer; for they are in immediate need of some one, whether I be chosen or not."

"Oh, Hugh! it is a providence for our help," said the widow. "Did I not know the Father of the fatherless would care for his own, when His good time came; and even if this fails, we must not be disheartened, for His time is the best time, and His way the best way, even though we see it not."

They were just then sitting down to their little meal, still a very spare one, though considerably improved since yesterday.

"This is Aikman's night, mother," said Hugh; "my uncle dines with Mr. Renshaw to-day; but he wants me again to-morrow. I shall have this night clear for Aikman; he will be as glad of this as any of us."

"So he will," said Mrs. Melville; "but, Hugh, you cannot continue teaching him, when you are working all day."

"Teaching him!" Hugh laughed. "Well I must take no more money from him, mother. He is a friend now; you must let him come as usual, and we can study together, for I will need to study myself at all my spare hours. A hundred a-year! You will be able to get Jane back again, mother, and give up that everlasting sewing—we shall be quite rich with a hundred a-year."

"Well, Hugh, no doubt it looks a great sum," said the widow, shaking her head, though she smiled; "but when one comes to give it out, it shrinks a good deal. We must keep the work, Hugh, in some degree; but I should be very glad to get back Jane—only we must first catch our hare."

In the evening the lexicons and the grammars were again laid out solemnly upon the table—not quite ejecting, however, the work-

basket, which modestly withdrew itself to a corner. Mrs. Melville had ventured upon the very unusual luxury of two candles, not without a misgiving that it was a great extravagance. The fire was bright, and better sized than usual, and that and the additional light gave an aspect of more than ordinary cheerfulness to the little room. Isabella sat by the table sewing, her hair and her dress arranged with a little greater care, than she had been used to expend on them; this not from expectation of John Aikman, but from a little girlish exhilaration springing out of her uncle's praise—while her mother's seat stood ready at the warmer angle of the corner, and Hugh and his books expatiated over all the remainder of the square table. It was true the room was very small, and the black hair-cloth

chairs and sofa were not at all elegant; nevertheless, it was a pleasant fireside to come in to, and John Aikman thought it a kind of Paradise.

There surely never was such a running commentary on any other Virgil; for John Aikman, good fellow, was the strangest of scholars, and a resounding line of Latin was scarcely out of his mouth, when like any other idle school-boy, the boards of the Virgil were flapping loosely in his hand, and himself asking comical questions about the delicate work, on which his great hand had fallen. Poor Queen Dido! if she only could have heard the ringing laugh of Isabella Melville strike through the record of her despair!

"I say, Melville," exclaimed Aikman, suddenly pausing in the middle of a line,

"I forgot the great news I have to tell you. I 'm going to begin business."

"Are you? I am glad to hear it; but we never shall get on, you know, at this rate."

"Pooh! never mind getting on," said John, as he closed the book over his hand, holding his great thumb between the leaves to mark the place. "I tell you I'm to begin business next month; in a small way—only in a small way, Mrs. Melville; but I was thinking, you know, that if nothing better turned up, Hugh might come to me. If we hadn't very much to do, at first, in our office, we might have a try at the Virgil now and then; and if we did make a wonderful hit, and the world appreciated genius, we could paint out the John Aikman on the door, and paint in Aikman and Melville, and set up for great merchants. Why, Hugh, that

would be an advantageous beginning, in comparison with what many have had who are really great merchants now."

"Thank you, Aikman, it is very good of you," said Hugh, warmly; "but I've heard of a situation in Renshaw, Brownlow, and Co's. worth a hundred a-year."

"Ah, Melville, my good fellow, you won't get it," said Aikman.

"You should tell your friend our great news, too," said Mrs. Melville, with just a little pride. "We met with a brother of mine yesterday, Mr. Aikman, Quentin Greenlees, from India; and he pledges himself to get a situation for Hugh."

John Aikman's lips suddenly moulded themselves into the shape of a "whew!" but recollecting himself in time, he blushed crimson, and hung down his head.

"Well, do you know, Mrs. Melville, I'm a little disappointed," he said, after a pause. "Not that it is possible I could be otherwise than rejoiced, at what is to benefit Hugh; but I think we might have got on so capitally together; and if it was small at first, he could have had a share of the business, you know, as soon as it was worth sharing. I say, Melville, I've got it; get your uncle to set you up along with me. I haven't much capital; we can easily be made equal in that respect; and to be in business one's-self is better than a clerkship."

"No, Aikman," said Hugh, shaking his head, "I should like it very greatly, but it won't do. We have made up our minds to ask my uncle for nothing, except help to get a situation; and moreover, Aikman, the

situation will be only temporary you know, for I must not give up my profession."

"Well, man, no fear of the profession," said John, a little impatiently. "How can you save money off a hundred a-year to finish your studies? it's not possible you know —is it Mrs. Melville? whereas, if we succeeded at all in our beginning, the business might go on and thrive, and you be at College all the time. You shake your head—well—will *you* go into partnership with me, Mrs. Melville?"

When John turned his face towards her mother, smiling as he asked the question, his eye suddenly fell upon Isabella. Isabella was laughing, partly at his proposition, partly out of the lightness of her heart; and as her merry unconstrained glance met John's for an instant, and then returned to her work, he

stopped, grew very red, and opened his Virgil. Hugh's sister had occupied a very small share in his thoughts hitherto, and most unlover-like would have been the "very nice girl," which was all the praise he could have given her; but just now by some singular chance, a consciousness took possession of John's mind. "Will *you* enter into partnership with me, Mrs. Melville." If he had not been very much confused and bashful, John Aikman would certainly have laughed aloud at his own question.

But no one appeared to notice his sudden blush and embarrassment, though the little gale, which he had raised by throwing open his book, made the flame of the candle flicker, and considerably disturbed the steady aim, which Mrs. Melville was taking at the eye of her needle, with her thread. So John

put both his elbows on the table, after his usual fashion, and drooping his head between his two supporting hands, looked up under his eyebrows at Isabella again.

"My brother means to marry, I suppose," said Mrs. Melville, smiling; "he says so at least—and we want no help from him except in this one instance. I could not ask him to give Hugh what you call capital, Mr. Aikman. No, it is exceedingly good of you, and like a friend—but Hugh must be content to be a clerk."

John Aikman said not a word;—under the shadow of his great arms and stooping head, the Virgil lay open on the table, but Hugh Melville's pupil was glancing shyly under his eyebrows at Hugh Melville's sister, and had not the smallest interest in Queen Dido.

Isabella was rather pale, and it did not quite suit her to be pale; neither did her sombre dress—the black gown, with its plain white mourning collar—look at all appropriate to her sanguine spirited face, from which the curves of her laugh had not quite vanished. This laugh was gliding over her features like circles in still water—withdrawing from the half composed lips, to an incipient dimple in one cheek, and widening up to the eyes, which glanced merrily through their drooping lashes. But if her dress did not very particularly become her—and John Aikman blushed deeper, and deeper as he asked himself what he had to do with her dress—this half-restrained mirth did; and so did the brown hair slightly turned over on her forehead, which showed a lining under it of a richer colour, almost red. There

was something very human in all these—not lofty or grand, or angel-like, it is true, but something which had its charm; and John Aikman feeling a secret pleasure in uttering a slander which he knew was not true, said to himself, "red hair," and again blushed when he had said it.

"Isabella," said Mrs. Melville.

It is only something about the work, and John does not discern the other words; but for the first time he ponders on the name; it is a fine name, something too stately for this bearer of it—and John plays with the word, and breaks it up into its diminutives, all of which he condemns, and thinks with secret merriment how this not remarkably meek young lady would like to be called Tibbie—Tibbie—he repeats it half aloud, and laughs.

"What did you say Aikman?" asked Hugh, who had been watching his friend with some astonishment.

"Nothing — nothing — I mean I beg your pardon, Mrs. Melville, my thoughts were quite impertinent just now," said Aikman, again laughing, while his very hair upon his forehead seemed tinged, with the flush which rose to its roots. "When I heard you address Miss Melville, there just occurred to me one of the contractions of her name—that was all."

"That was all; you are very good to laugh at my name, Mr. Aikman," said Isabella, "which means you were laughing at me."

"No, no, you are quite mistaken, Miss Melville," said Aikman, hurriedly. "Hugh,

this Virgil is the slowest fellow—let's have at him again."

They began again vigorously, and got over half a dozen lines in triumph.

"I say, Melville," interrupted the scholar, again shutting down the book on his thumb, when they had reached the middle of the seventh line, "when are you to hear about Renshaw's place?"

"To-morrow, Aikman; there now, let us get on; Virgil, honest man, never had so many interruptions in his story, I believe, before."

"Oh, he doesn't mind," said Aikman, laughing; "besides, I believe it is nearly eight—we should be done with him by this time; and what sort of a place is it in Renshaw's, Melville?"

"Clerk—to help in sundry correspon-

dences," said Hugh. "There seem to be French and German letters, which bother Mr. Renshaw a good deal, and I could manage that, I think."

"I got an introduction to Mr. Renshaw when I came here. He asked me to dine once," said Aikman. "But he's too great a man to keep on dining terms with me. Is your uncle sufficiently potential, Melville?"

Mrs. Melville drew herself up slightly.

"Oh yes, I fancy so," said Hugh; "all sorts of people are polite to nabobs, and my uncle is a member of that golden fraternity. I think if influence is to get the place, his will do."

"Very well—very well," said Aikman, swinging about by his elbows. "I can't quite help a little disappointment, you know,

but if it must be, and is to be good for you, why then it is very well, and I am glad; you can always have my little office to fall back upon, Melville, so I shan't grumble. Only we might have got on with Virgil famously in that same little office, where, I presume, there won't be a quite overpowering quantity of business at first."

"Do you know anything of Mr. Wardrop's family, Mr. Aikman?" asked Mrs. Melville.

"Yes; there's four dashing daughters," said John, vacantly, looking again at Isabella.

"I don't mean that; how are they provided for?"

John awoke slowly, and feeling conscious that he had not at all understood the question, nor had the remotest interest in

Mr. Wardrop's family, further than for an involuntary contrast, instituted unawares between the four dashing daughters and the by no means dashing Isabella, blushed again, and shook himself with awkward bashfulness.

"Why, the son Tom has got a situation out at New Orleans," he answered, "and the ladies have gone down to Helensburgh, or some of those places on the Clyde, to live on the money they got collected for them. Oh! no fear of the Wardrops. They'll be marrying lots of people bye and bye."

"Lots of people, Aikman!" exclaimed Hugh, laughing.

John thought he had said something improper; he arched his hands again among his hair, and bowed down his head within the arch, while his cheeks tingled;

for under his careless *brusque* manner he carried the most chivalrous delicacy, and would have broken an arm or a leg any day, sooner than have brought a blush upon a pure cheek.

"I mean, you know—why, you understand that four men—I beg their pardon—four gentlemen, captivated by four ladies, would make rather a considerable lot of people; is he not a provoking fellow, Mrs. Melville? and the Wardrops will all be married, of course—they're fit for nothing else."

Poor John! he thought he had overshot his mark again; that the colour rose in Isabella Melville's cheek, though she laughed merrily, and that her mother looked a little angry; so John closed his Virgil for the night, and rising from his chair stumbled

over Mrs. Melville's footstool; having accomplished which feat, he withdrew to the fire-place, and leaning on the mantel-piece, turned his back to them, eclipsing entirely the merry little fire, and looking like nothing so much as a great shy Newfoundland dog, embarrassed greatly, and very conscious of his embarassment.

Bye and bye he got his great-coat on, and went away, thinking he had made a very indifferent appearance that night, and feeling considerably vexed about it; nevertheless they listened to his footstep, as he went somewhat heavily down the street, and smiled to each other, and said how pleasant it was to have such an honest warm friend. Good awkward John! it would have cheered him as he stumbled into his solitary parlour in the dark, and

had some difficulty in lighting his candle, at the dull smouldering dusty fire, if he could have heard those words.

CHAPTER II.

The next day Hugh again accompanied his uncle, to the office of Messrs. Renshaw, Brownlow and Co., and this time returned home half running, with such a brilliant glow in his eyes and on his face, that his mother did not need to ask her usual question. He had got the situation—the magnificent hundred a-year.

On the following day, the family again

dined with Mr. Greenlees; he was just about to start for Perthshire, though travelling further north in the face of those cold February winds, and under those darkened skies, was not by any means delightful; but Mr. Greenlees did not admire Liverpool. True, there were sundry very rich people in it—solemn merchants like Mr. Goudie, and jolly ones like Mr. Gardner, but the Nabob was sufficiently wealthy himself to have no exclusive preference for mere gold—and there was nothing else.

Nothing else except sundry miles of docks, a beautiful heathen temple and a fine river. But no one dreamed that the river was fine. No one thought for an instant, that those white sails flashing along its broad blue joyous waters, represented anything but so much property—cargoes, consignments,

bills of lading—and though the wind curled and crisped the clear bright waves, and like a child played with the fluttering sail and pennon, and laughed among the cordage, and rocked the boat lying under the ship's shadow, all out of its happy cheer and joy in so much beauty, few of the hundreds who came and went across the river every hour, had the least idea that there was anything but prosperity and flourishing trade and "making money" in all this; for Birkenhead Park, and its small rival at the southern side of Liverpool, were much greater lions than the noble Mersey.

Now it happened that Mr. Greenlees had not the least interest either in the Park at Birkenhead, or in its little brother, nor very much in the vociferous confused docks. And the sightless heathen beauty was soon looked

at, and the bright Mersey recalled to Quentin Greenlees visions of the beautiful Tay; so he twisted a piece of crisp rustling paper round Isabella Melville's needle scarred finger, and shook hands hastily with them all, as he bade them farewell.

The crisp piece of paper was a note for twenty pounds. Twenty pounds! it was a fortune, a portion, an inexhaustible dower. Mrs. Melville put it away in her locked drawer with secret tears, feeling it strengthen her like a hidden treasure. Twenty pounds laid by! Isabella's portion! and Hugh receiving a hundred pounds a-year, and their own work going on quietly, not enough to oppress, but to keep them pleasantly occupied; while Jane, recalled to the kitchen, "did her best" to save herself from needful censure. It again became a happy household.

But when the heavy pressure of care was so much removed, the grief which they had been forced to subdue returned upon them with renewed strength. While they were striving so painfully for daily bread, the smallest alleviation was accepted with gratitude, and enjoyed; but now, as the old placid days returned upon them—as they began to live as they had been used to live before the father was taken away, they felt more and more the father's vacant place. He was gone—when pain came to them, there was in their hearts almost a solemn rejoicing, that he had escaped the evil; but when prosperity returned, and when those dark skies began to brighten into spring—spring, the season he had loved so well—the hearts which still clung to him sank and saddened; and as the days crept out, and

John Aikman now sat at the window, and read his Virgil by the light of the last sunbeams, Mrs. Melville was wont to steal away to her own room, to weep over her dead.

But before this time the widow received a letter from Greenlees, of Greenlees, enclosing a post-office order for the precise sum she had asked from him—fifty shillings—and regretting that he was quite unable to do anything more for her—his own position entailed so many expenses upon him.

This had been written before the nabob brother had left Liverpool; but George Greenlees did not allude to his expected return:—the letter was cold as ice, constrained and mean—like the writer's self.

But on the following day came a more characteristic epistle:—

"Dear Aunt,

"I know you have written to my father, though I do not know what you have said to him, for he has torn the letter;—it is like him — he always does such things. Fortunately, a little scrap of it came to my hands, containing your address. It is very true, you do not know me, Aunt Melville; but for all that, you need not think me like my father. I am not like him. I am something like you, Katie Guthrie says; and I am sure if any one asked me to run away from Greenlees, I should have very little objection.

"But what I mean to say, is, that if you want anything—I beg your pardon, Aunt Melville, but Katie says my uncle never was so rich as my father is—Uncle Quentin is

coming home, and will be in Liverpool, I think, just now. He has written to me once or twice; he seems to be different from my father. See him, aunt, and don't let him come here to be courted for his money. *I* will not do it certainly; but it is humiliating to see it done.

"I only know my cousins' names, and that Isabella is the same age as me. She might write me in charity; and you *ought*, aunt, if you will not think me forward to say so, for they tell me I am a wild girl; how is it possible I should be anything else, when no one ever cared for me—no gentlewoman in the world—only Katie Guthrie.

"My father is calling me; I must stop. This used to be your room where I am writing now, and I would like to let

you see it again. Good bye, Aunt Melville.

"Your affectionate niece,

"ESTHER GREENLEES."

This letter occasioned some amusement—a good deal of interest—and, in Mrs. Melville's mind, a little horror at her young niece's apprehension of her father's character. So Esther Greenlees got two letters, one from the widow herself, full of grave and kind counsel, mixed with a little gentle reproof, for the manner in which she had spoken of "my brother, your father, Greenlees, of Greenlees," and a shy, kindly one from Isabella, who was very anxious to make acquaintance with her cousin, but at the same time, very much at a loss what to say.

These letters, however, had received no answer, though April was now half spent, and Mrs. Melville felt a little offended, that her own overture and Isabella's should have been rejected. She had immediately returned to George Greenlees the amount of his loan, and since that time, with the exception of a brief kindly note from Uncle Quentin, announcing his arrival, there had been no communication between the families.

And still John Aikman came to get his lessons; and still he stumbled and blushed, and felt himself terribly awkward, though the widow and her daughter conscientiously believed that he improved every day. John, within himself, upbraided Isabella with having red hair, laughed at her secretly by the name of Tibbie, noted every blunder she made with malicious exultation; but, not-

withstanding, started and felt himself grow hot and angry, if Hugh ventured to laugh at one of those same little blunders, or if Mrs. Melville reproved them. Isabella had the mishap to overturn an ink-bottle—"Isabella, how clumsy you are!" exclaimed Hugh, with momentary impatience, and John starting up fiercely, looked daggers at his bosom friend. Isabella tore a piece of fine muslin unawares—"My dear, take care," said Mrs. Melville, with a tone of censure, and John angrily shut his Virgil, and blew Mrs. Melville's work out of her hand with the gale he made; yet, nevertheless, John remembered those little failings of Isabella's, and laughed at them secretly in his solitary room—exaggerated them even. What did it mean?

CHAPTER III.

THERE has been a storm over night, and the houses on the hill still rock with the gusts of wind, which buffet one another like a couple of wild boys, half in mirth, half in anger, over all this eminence. It is the last week of April, and under those beautiful white drifting clouds, the sky looks out as clear and soft as an infant's eye; but the young foliage has been considerably

frayed by this wind, and here and there lies a bough rich with fresh quivering buds, which has been torn off some of the adjacent trees. In Mrs. Melville's little flower-plot some primroses and violets are blooming on the moist dark-coloured soil; and in the centre is a little lilac bush, which the widow examines with solicitude every morning, hoping to find some promise that it will blossom this year;—but, save for the young fresh vigorous shoots, covered with leaves so softly tinted, brown and green, that you scarcely miss the blossom, there seems to be little hope this summer for the lilac bush.

The small green venetian blind is open, and you see Mrs. Melville sitting at the window with her work—though this is not work for the shop, but household sewing,

which it is pleasant to labour at. A little in, in front of the opened blind, sits Isabella, and she is making a beautiful delicate baby's robe, which some young wealthy mother has ordered from the good Quakers. The snowy muslin falls over Isabella's black dress, and relieves it; and the finger which Uncle Quentin covered with the twenty-pound note, looks by no means unbecomingly scarred; — and sometimes as she glances up from her fine elaborate work, you see in her eyes a clear sunshine like the spring — not bright enough for joy—softened by those drooping eye-lashes into something dearer, gentler than joy, but clear with the hope and youthful life, which cannot disown the natural kindred of the spring.

The house is not entirely quiet: from the kitchen behind, you hear now and then an

impatient poking of the fire, or the rather careless ring with which Jane's plates and cups and saucers strike against each other, mingled with ceaseless echoes of Jane's feet, and snatches of her singing voice; the kitchen door is more than half closed—so is this one in the parlour—and the sounds are pleasant, softened by their passage from one apartment to the other.

These two days have been rather chill; and though it is April, and Mrs. Melville thinks it out of order to have a fire, there is one in the parlour grate;—a little fire, puffing and blazing with might and main, as if to avenge itself for having such a small supply of fuel. The square table has a new cover, a bright coloured pretty one; and if you looked very closely, you might discover a new book or two on those shelves, under

which stands the not very musical piano, and the writing desk, preciously freighted at present with those essays on things in general, which Hugh still delights to write.

The mother and daughter are talking cheerfully together; Hugh gets on so well in his new office. And John Aikman, in whose fortune Mrs. Melville has grown greatly interested, and whom Isabella wonders at herself, for missing so much on the three nights a-week, when he does *not* come, has begun business and thrives too. This is not one of Aikman's nights—Isabella is by no means delighted, as she remembers it.

There is a cab labouring up the steep street—an irresolute uncertain cab, stopping to look at the numbers on the doors, and evidently at a loss where it is to deposit

its freight. This freight consists of one small box beside the coachman, and a bonnet within; but it is not easy, the bonnet dives so constantly from side to side, examining the numbers, to discover who its wearer is.

At last, the vehicle draws up, exactly opposite Mrs. Melville's gate.

"Who can it be, Isabella?" said Mrs. Melville, with a little perturbation.

"Somebody for Mrs. Williams next door," said Isabella, quietly; "nobody comes to us in cabs and with trunks, mother."

Very true—but this is nobody for Mrs. Williams. Mrs. Williams, good Cambrian woman, would have been utterly shocked had any young lady visitor of hers, thrown open the door of the vehicle in such a hasty way, without waiting for the tardy descent of the driver. The bonnet appeared at the

window, overhung by a veil, which the mischievous wind immediately threw down on the face of the wearer, hiding it entirely; a small gloved hand stole out and opened the door, and with a quick active step, the stranger sprang to the ground.

She waved her hand impatiently to the driver, just then descending from his seat, and without a pause, came to Mrs. Melville's door, and knocked.

"Who can it be?" again exclaimed Mrs. Melville.

Isabella threw down her work, and hastened to open the door.

In the interval, the stranger has put back her veil: it is naturally a ruddy face, but is at present pale with evident anxiety and fatigue; and the hair—bright reddish hair, like Isabella's own—has been sadly blown about by the wind. By the careless folds of

her shawl, by her dress, not in the most excellent order, it is easy to see that she has just finished a wearisome journey.

"Are you—I mean—" said the newcomer, hastily; "does Mrs. Melville live here?"

"Yes," said Isabella.

The young lady did not say another word, but entering as quickly as she had sprung from the coach, and pressing Isabella's hand as she passed, hurried before her into the parlour. In perfect bewilderment, Isabella followed.

"Aunt Melville," said the stranger, proceeding without pause or hesitation to the widow, who remained sitting by the window, "I have run away from Greenlees. I have no friends—nobody to take care of me. Will you let me come here?"

"My dear!" faltered the amazed widow.

"I am Esther Greenlees—I will not be useless—I will do anything. But, aunt, will you take me in? Will you let me come here?"

"Let you come? Surely. Could you have any doubt, my dear? But, Esther Greenlees, let me look at you; you are like Isabella—you are not like your mother."

"Am I like Isabella? I did not think I was so bonnie. But, oh, aunt, I'm wearied. And will you promise—will you take me in?"

"Isabella, see about your cousin's trunk," said Mrs. Melville, leading the stranger to the warm corner of the sofa. "Never mind explanations just now, Esther, my dear. Tell me how far you have come to-day; and then you must rest, for I see you are very wearied."

But Esther's courage was failing; and when Isabella returned, having sent off the cabman with his vehicle, and safely received the trunk, she found her cousin with her bonnet off, and her bright disordered hair falling about her cheeks, crying as if her heart would break.

"My dear!" said Mrs. Melville, gently laying her hand on her shoulder.

The girl sprang up.

"I'm not sorry, Isabella; but you have said nothing to me yet. It's not for leaving home, aunt; it's because you're so kind to me—as if my father's daughter deserved anything from you! But, aunt, I don't think you will believe it, even of him—he's married again."

"George—my brother! Is it possible?" exclaimed Mrs. Melville.

"And I could not bear it," said Esther, unconsciously clenching the little hand which rested on the table. "To disgrace himself was bad enough, but she would have ruled *me;* and I could not bear it, aunt: so I thought I might come to you. Uncle Quentin said Isabella worked—I am able to work too. Say something to me, Isabella."

It was a difficult matter this, for Isabella did not know what to say.

"I am very glad you have come, cousin Esther," she said, at last, with some shyness; "very glad; I have wished to see you often."

"Have you, though? Are you sure?" exclaimed the eager Esther. "Aunt, I shall be no burden; see, I could do what Isabella has been doing;" and she snatched up the work which had fallen on the ground. "I

will do anything you like, aunt. I am as strong as one of the ponies at Greenlees, Katie Guthrie says; and I shall be no burden."

"I am not at all afraid, Esther," said Mrs. Melville, kindly. The young visitor had risen, and was standing in front of the fire-place, with the muslin robe in her hand. Her thick shawl was still on; her bright hair was straying loosely on her neck; her face was flushed with natural excitement, full of smiles and tears; while her bonnet, with the veil wrapped round it, not quite gracefully, lay on the square table.

"I am not afraid, Esther," repeated Mrs. Melville. "How far have you travelled to-day?"

"You may be ashamed of me, aunt, indeed. I know my dress is quite dreadful,"

said Esther, blushing; "but we left Glasgow very early yesterday morning, and now it is four o'clock; and we have been all the time on the sea. Last night, I thought we never could reach Liverpool, the storm was so terrible. I almost believed I was the Jonah, aunt, and half repented running away; but now, I don't repent—I am most glad; only I will never go anywhere by sea again, if I should live a hundred years. Where is Isabella?"

"She has gone to get tea ready; you must need it, I am sure," said Mrs. Melville.

"Yes, I shall be very glad," said Esther. "May I take off my shawl, and sit here awhile, aunt, before I go up-stairs to put myself in order?—that is, if my cousin Hugh is not in to see me," and Esther laughed

as she put back her hair, and blushed a little.

"Hugh does not come in till six," said the widow, helping the travel-worn stranger to disengage herself from her shawl. "You have quite time to rest, and refresh yourself before he comes; and, my dear, remember you are at home; we will use no ceremony with you."

The tears came flooding into Esther's eyes; to conceal them, she bent her head over the hand which was doing those gentle offices to her, and kissed it as she said,

"Thank you, aunt."

It improved her appearance greatly to have the shawl taken away. She was dressed in a brown gown, which closed prettily with its simple frill of lace round a very white, graceful throat; and Esther was handsome,

though not very slender, and looked so full of vigorous life and spirit, that the sight of her refreshed the home-dweller like a bracing breeze; but, alas! the forefinger of that small left hand with which she is putting back her hair, has not a single trace upon it of the honourable needle; and already her little foot pats briskly upon the fender, and you see that all her fatigue and weariness have vanished in a moment, and that she is a restless, active, impatient spirit, which it will take some strength to control.

"Aunt," she asked suddenly, "is Isabella shy? I suppose I am not shy?" and the blood rushed over Esther's neck and forehead with ingenuous haste; "but I don't think I am forward, aunt; only I have never had anybody to do anything for me, except Katie Guthrie, and you know she could not manage

me. So that I have been compelled to do things which other girls don't do; but I am not forward, aunt."

"And I am not shy, Esther; ask Uncle Quentin," said Isabella, preceding Jane and the tray into the room; "only sometimes, you know, my mother scolds me. My mother will scold you sometimes bye and bye; are we like each other, mother?"

Isabella sat down on the sofa beside her cousin, and drew into better order the curl which had again escaped out of Esther's hand. There *was* a likeness between the two faces; but each was so individual and characteristic, that the most careless observer could not have mistaken the one for the other. Esther was a little stouter; Isabella a little taller; Esther's hair, beautiful, shining silken hair as it was, had considerably more

red in its brown than Isabella's had; and rural roses were on the fresh, soft, healthful cheeks of the daughter of Greenlees. Her eyes too, sparkling, daring, impatient eyes, were more constantly bright than Isabella's; they did not flash and kindle with sudden thoughts and purposes so often; they were steadier in their impetuous light. And the thoughtful lines of Isabella's face; the slight youthful pensiveness, with its contemplative grace and intellectual expression—pensiveness which only hovered over the countenance in its changes, like a summer cloud, but never shadowed its natural buoyancy—were lost in Esther's. You saw there, a rapid, determined, obstinate little *doer*—not at all accustomed to think of abstract things, and little used to shape her erratic course by any ideal; but very decidedly in the constan

habit of governing herself. You could almost read in her face that she was motherless, brotherless; that the beneficial use of tolerating others, and being tolerated in her turn, had never been known to her; that she was sole lady of her presence; but not, fortunately, that Esther had any particular admiration for herself, or thought that self faultless. She put her arm softly through Isabella's, and looked towards Mrs. Melville with a smile.

"Say yes, aunt," said Esther Greenlees, "and I'll think I'm bonnie."

"You are both very well, you two girls," said Mrs. Melville, speaking more playfully than she had done for a long time; "if there is nothing worse about you than your looks, you will do; but I see you think that is a doubtful compliment. Yes, my dear, you are

like Isabella, and Isabella is like you; I think you look younger than she does—people will fancy you sisters; but now, Esther, draw nearer to the fire, and Isabella will give you a cup of tea."

Esther sprang up, and seizing a chair, drew it to the side of the fire for Mrs. Melville; her fatigue had completely vanished; and now the sofa is wheeled a little forward, and the fragrant, consolatory tea, with "something to it," as Mrs. Melville says, sends up its refreshing vapour curling over Isabella's hand. Without, the wind rises, and a cloud which has been drifted from the sea, dissolves in a great shower, which the wind drives furiously against the panes; but the replenished fire crackles and sparkles within, and Esther's eyes dance and glow, and her merry laugh echoes through the

room. Mrs. Melville is human—happy to receive her niece for her niece's sake, there is too a certain pleasure in offering such a cheerful shelter as this, to the daughter of George Greenlees.

CHAPTER IV.

"I NEVER heard of it till Saturday night, aunt," said Esther, her eyes flashing, and a deep colour rising to her cheek. "In the beginning of the week, Uncle Quentin had been joking my father, and me too, of course, about there being no heir to Greenlees; it would only go to a girl, he said," continued Esther, looking angry, "as if a girl were not as good as a boy any day! After that I

thought my father looked rather strange, and he spoke about it a good many times, and then, at last, I heard of this. He told me—he was actually able, aunt, to tell me himself! The woman—the lady—but she is not a lady—who is to be my father's wife, lives only a mile or two off. I know her well enough; and I could not endure her for an hour."

"My dear, if it had been duty," said Mrs. Melville mildly.

"Duty, aunt! do you think if *you* had been coming home to Greenlees, as you should have done, of course, if my father had been a man like—"

"Esther, my dear!" interposed the widow.

"What is it, aunt?" said the niece, restraining a slight impatience, and looking up with some astonishment.

"You really must not speak so of your

father, my dear; it is not right; he *is* your father, and that is enough."

"Ah, yes, quite enough, when one can respect one's father," said Esther.

"You must not say such things, indeed," said Mrs. Melville.

"Must one not say what one thinks?" asked the candid Esther. "I should be very glad if I did not think it—but I do; and except to you aunt, I would not say it, of course. You must know my father well enough; there is no use for hiding what I think, when I speak to you."

"Esther, my dear," said the widow, "I cannot expect that you should have formed no opinion of your father; but you must not pronounce judgment. Indeed you must not. In every heart there is a mixture, Esther; with the amiable, shadows of evil, and with

the unamiable, suggestions of good; we would need to see all before we could absolutely judge; and my brother is your father, my dear. You must not judge him even in your own mind."

Esther's cheeks glowed and tingled, and a defiant fire kindled in her eye; it was almost the first check she had ever received, and she felt it unpalatable, though her better judgment told her it was right.

"But Esther, my mother has interrupted you—go on," said Isabella.

"I was going to say," said Esther, somewhat hotly, "that if my aunt had come to Greenlees, I should have yielded her proper submission at once, as cheerfully as you would, Isabella; but this woman!—So on the Sabbath day, Katie and I had a consulta-

tion, and Katie consented to come with me to Glasgow, where she has some friends. You remember Katie Guthrie, aunt?"

"Yes—she was a girl when I left Greenlees. She seems to have been very attentive to you, Esther?" said Mrs. Melville.

Esther shook a tear off her eyelashes.

"Poor Katie! if you think I did have too much of my own way, aunt, Katie could not help it; for she was only my nurse, and no one else took any care of me. So on Monday morning very early we left Greenlees, and Katie came with me to Glasgow. She gave me the money too, aunt Melville. Was it right to take the money from Katie?"

Mrs. Melville was puzzled; since there was not very much in the whole matter to call right.

"We must pay it back to her as soon as possible," she said with a smile.

"Oh! I gave her a note to Uncle Quentin," said Esther, blushing; "he will pay her just now, and I can pay him; though poor Katie cried when I spoke of giving her back the money. I think—it's not because I'm conceited—but I think Katie likes me, aunt."

Mrs. Melville laid her hand caressingly on Esther's shoulder. The poor girl had been very nearly crying before; she was entirely overcome now.

"Aunt—Isabella—unamiable means unloveable; don't think me that," said Esther, with some sobs.

"Esther!" exclaimed Isabella.

"My dear, you must not speak nonsense; I never let Isabella speak nonsense when I

can help it," said Mrs. Melville, smiling. "Come, now I see you girls will aid and abet each other in rebelling against me; but here comes my sober Hugh to put you down."

"Is it my cousin Hugh?" said Esther, springing in an instant out of her tears, and seizing her shawl and her bonnet. "Don't let him see me, Isabella; don't open the door; quick, let me go up stairs."

And the two girls flew up stairs to the little unoccupied bed-chamber, which Jane, very full of the novelty of a strange visitor, had just been arranging in splendid style, as she fancied.

"We have got a new inmate, Hugh," said Mrs. Melville quietly, as her son entered, his face glowing from the attacks of

the wind, and his mind full of a magnificent new idea for his book on things in general.

"A new inmate? what do you say mother? you surely could never dream of having a lodger now!"

"The lodger has come without any invitation," said his mother; "the guest—the new member of the family—your cousin Esther is here, Hugh."

"Mother!"

"Yes, your Uncle George is about to marry again, and your cousin, who seems to have quite sufficient will for a young lady, ran away to come to us."

"Did she, though?" said Hugh, with a brightening face. "She must be a sensible girl; what like is she, mother?"

"Like Isabella, Hugh."

Like Isabella; it did not convey any very clear notion of Esther's appearance to the mind of her cousin.

"And what do you think of her, mother?"

Mrs. Melville smiled, and shook her head.

"A wild girl; a wild, self-willed, affectionate, restless girl; and I don't know how she will take with our little house, and limited means; but we shall all grow very fond of her, I foresee."

Hugh laughed a little, and looked quite pleasantly excited.

"How fortunate it is we have the means," he said, with a smile.

"Ay, Hugh, a great mercy," said his mother, "the poor bairn—though I cannot justify her for running away—might have

led a very unhappy life, with her wilful temper, if she had been forced to remain at home, or would have made a foolish marriage, or done something rash, no doubt; but our small income, Hugh, will scarcely bear another—only she speaks of working with Isabella."

"But she is our guest; you won't let her, mother?" said Hugh.

"What Isabella Melville does, Esther Greenlees may do," said the mother, somewhat proudly; "but take your dinner, Hugh, my man, for your cousin will be down immediately."

The hint was quite sufficient to hurry Hugh. His dinner disappeared with marvellous rapidity, and his hand had stolen up unconsciously to arrange his hair, when Isabella, with a little mischief in her in-

tention, threw open the parlour door, and announced Miss Greenlees.

Esther's hair curled naturally; beautiful shining short curls which did not droop much lower than her cheek, and her fine complexion heightened by a slight bashfulness at this formal entry, contrasted very pleasantly with the fainter flush on Isabella's cheek. Esther's eyes were cast down, with a little embarrassment; Isabella's were bright with mirth and pleasure. The stranger, with a natural feeling of delicacy and respect, for the deep mourning which the family still wore, had assumed a black silk gown, the only one in her wardrobe; and as they stood together, it was very easy to fancy them sisters. One older, to whom the thoughtfulness of womanhood had come—while the other, saved by this same sisterhood from all

those cares, was full of the glad enjoyment of her young beautiful life. As Esther stood hesitating at the door, and Isabella looked over her shoulder, and Hugh, remembering then how his Uncle Quentin asked him if he had ever seen his cousin, and the laugh and the inference which followed, advanced with a blush and a consciousness to meet them, Mrs. Melville, sitting on the sofa in the cheerful firelight, fancied that those three figures would have made a very pretty picture.

They made the little room beautiful certainly; you could not look to any side of it without meeting one of those bright animated faces; and Hugh, when they had left him, late in the evening, to lock the door and bar the windows by himself, lingered in the parlour a moment, remembering how

he had quite forgotten his magnificent idea, and secretly pronouncing his cousin Esther prettier than Isabella.

CHAPTER V.

The winds are calmed and have passed away, leaving behind them only a soft breath, which rustles among the young foliage, and gently waves the vigorous shoots of Mrs. Melville's lilac bush. The sun is setting yonder in the west, but himself is invisible just now; he has slid behind a great cloud, which rolls its long bold line across the unsufferable brightness of the blue

heaven beyond. This cloud has an upper rim of dazzling whiteness, behind which the light glows upward, intense and glorious; but under this beautiful illuminated edge, a mass of soft brown, here and there letting a speck of gold shine through, hangs between the sky and the waves. The shadow of the cloud lies upon the lighthouse and the fort, and lays a bar across the river's mouth; but beyond it, the waters riot in the flood of sunshine, as if a wilder exhilaration possessed them, because the rays come to them stealthily, from behind the prison wall of cloud. Ships come and go out of the beautiful horizon, ships lie nestling about the edges of the shore, and here the air is busy with the voices of children, and the young grass rustles under the little feet, so that they think they can hear it grow.

Trudging up the steep street, with a book under his arm, comes John Aikman. The book is a beautiful book. Gentle Rogers with his placid verse and his fine illustrations. Some one has said in John's hearing, that this is Isabella Melville's birth-day, and to his own infinite amusement and considerable wonder, he has brought her a birthday present. Much blushing at himself, and secret laughter this book has cost John, and after he had bought it, so much was he ashamed of himself, that he left his lodgings without it to-night—but only to return again to look at it, made up in a neat parcel on his table, and with another mighty blush to bring it away.

Yes, Isabella Melville has red hair, good John—has a name which can be contracted into Tibbie—upsets the ink-bottle some-

times, and sometimes tears her muslin. Nevertheless, John catches a glimpse of the golden rays which steal through yonder brown cloud, and thinks they are not unlike —not by any means unlike—and that, after all, there is something extremely musical in the sound of Tibbie.

Mrs. Melville sits in the little parlour alone; the window is open—the soft air without flutters among the shower of primroses, which surround the lilac bush, and carries their fragrance pleasantly into the quiet room. The simple, kindly, childlike flowers—they remind her of so many springs which are gone.

For instead of orange blossoms, Isabella Greenlees wore primroses in her hair, when she was a bride, and, like primroses, her children had died in their early summer.

The little human buds were like those spring flowers, and the breath of the primroses was sweet to her, as the young angel voices of the dead.

Those dead who seemed to be less lost, since their father joined them in heaven; and the widow, weeping quiet, not unhappy tears, fancied that they spoke to her sweet messages from him. The soft air rustled with wings and little footsteps—not stranger angels, but the little human souls which the Lord had taken into his own bosom—fair young souls, still human, though their school was heaven.

She was sitting thus, thinking of her dead, when Aikman reached the door. With an effort, the widow wiped her quiet tears from her cheek, and recalled her thoughts, so that she was at last able to meet him with her usual smile.

Aikman looked round him wonderingly as he entered: no one in but Mrs. Melville—he felt considerably disappointed.

"They have gone to take a walk; they have gone to the brae which, Hugh calls Mount Vision, to shew their cousin the view," said Mrs. Melville.

Their cousin! John clutched at the book under his arm, as if he could have tossed it away. His imagination at the moment suggested to him only one possible kind of cousin.

"It is my niece Esther, from Greenlees," said Mrs. Melville, perceiving with a little amusement the fiery red, which began to glow over John's face: "She arrived quite unexpectedly yesterday, and will remain for some time, I think."

"Oh! a young lady," said John graciously,

but with the slightest possible tone of contempt.

"Yes, she is about the same age as Isabella, and they are like each other—here they come," said Mrs Melville.

Yes, there they come—one of them on each side of Hugh, who looks extremely well pleased with his position. Esther's veil floats about her bonnet in the strangest erratic way, now and then plunging down over her face to her great annoyance, and the amusement of Hugh; and at last, when they are within sight of the door, though still a little distance from it, the veil is seized impatiently and pulled off.

"What a little fury," said John Aikman to himself; "after all very different from—though she has red hair. Red hair—this one's hair is fiery—to call *her* like Isabella!"

And as his thoughts pronounced the name, the colour again flushed up to John Aikman's hair, and he shook with a secret, bashful laugh. To cover this, he unfolded his book.

"What do you think of this, Mrs. Melville?" said John.

Mrs. Melville took it up, looked at it, glanced over the illustrations, and said it was a beautiful book.

"I think," said John, feeling his throat suddenly become full of fiery particles, and coughing to be clear of them. "I think, Miss Melville has a favour for this mellifluous man; he is quite too sweet for me; and the illustrations are pretty—don't you think so, Mrs. Melville? so I brought it up, thinking that perhaps Miss Isabella—that perhaps you would like it—and—and would not refuse to accept it from me."

"Thank you—it is a beautiful present," said the widow; "but whether is it for Isabella or me, Mr. Aikman?"

Poor John!—he got up and stood at the window, to hasten the steps of the returning party, and did not at all know how to answer.

"I heard some one say it was Miss Melville's birthday," he muttered at last.

And now, Miss Melville has entered the room. One of Esther's restless hands Isabella has caught and drawn through her own arm, and they enter together so. John bows to the stranger—bows with a certain degree of fright and comical perturbation in his manner, to Isabella, too — and Esther suddenly grasps her cousin's arm as she looks on, and bites her lip to restrain her almost irrestrainable laughter; for he does look very

self-conscious, and very shy — this good, uncouth John.

And now they subside into their places. The lexicons and the grammars, Virgil, John, and Hugh, are sentenced to the square table behind, and at the window, the girls sit close to each other, working at the baby's robe. There is a great deal of work about it, and Isabella is very well content to accept her cousin's proffered help. But Esther has only found her thimble at the end of half-an-hour, and as she stoops to pick it up, drops her needle, and has an ineffectual hunt for it. When she has at last recovered this little weapon, she talks in such merry whispers, that the trio at the window are kept continually laughing under their breath, to the great interruption of the studies behind them, and the envy and discomposure of the stu-

dents. But, fortunately, Esther cannot long rest, even at her work; and now she gets up to flit back and forward across the room, on a hundred causeless errands, so that her shadow, as it comes and goes, completely confuses Virgil; and at last, as the evening darkens, and Mrs. Melville already in a faint voice has suggested candles. Esther steals behind backs, and opens the piano—the poor old imbecile piano. They are all silent—no one says a word—and immediately the room is filled with a clear, kindly, loveable voice, which the faint chiming of these invalided keys does not much harm. It is just an average voice, not cultivated except by good feeling and taste, and a happy, light-hearted, loving spirit; but these are great masters in music; and as they sit half in the dark, and Aikman bends his head over his Virgil, and

Isabella lets her work fall on her knee, and Hugh looks at Esther, and the mother suffers her kindly eye to wander among them all, they are all charmed with the simple song. For Esther is not shy—she does not think of herself at all, and, therefore, without either affectation or bashfulness, she sings like the birds.

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Renshaw, of the firm of Renshaw, Brownlow and Co., was an honourable, upright man; speak of him on 'Change, and not a voice but would praise him; speak of him where there were charitable committees, and a chorus of admiration would meet your ears. He gave subscriptions to all sorts of benevolences—no man could accuse him of exceeding, by a hair's breadth, the wide and

liberal code of morals which is permitted "in the way of business." His faults, if faults he had, were piously veiled by the veneration of respectful multitudes — a golden mist covered them—he was worth nearly half a million.

"Only be careful—only be attentive to business," said an anxious mother to her son, "and I may see you as great a merchant as Mr. Renshaw before I die."

The young man is an apprentice in Mr. Renshaw's office, doing a clerk's duty on a salary of thirty pounds a-year. In six months his apprenticeship will be out, and then, as his mother hopes and he expects, in consequence of this apprenticeship, which has lasted five years, he will at once get a permanent place in the office, and not less than fifty pounds of salary.

Poor anxious mother! poor expectant son! When the six months have passed and the apprenticeship is over, he is told that his services are no longer needed; a new apprentice, destined to serve another five years, who begins with no salary, and whose parents are elate at getting him admitted to the great counting-house, takes this young man's place; and he is thrown on the world —a world, alas! which has too many clerks to choose from—and may starve, or steal, or die to-morrow, for anything Mr. Renshaw cares.

And so this stream of young life pours through Mr. Renshaw's office—a constant supply of blythe, innocent boys, looking forward to the hazy brightness of the future, and hoping to attain, at the smallest, the cashier's or book-keeper's place, a permanent

occupation. In their first year's gratuitous services, you see them flying up and down the Custom-house stairs, swinging open the doors of banks and offices, racing to the post-office with sheaves of letters. Next year, perhaps, they get a present, a "Christmas-box" of ten or fifteen pounds; next year they have a salary of twenty, and thus the poor lads go on—happy for them if they do not learn the vices as well as the routine of the office—and the fathers and mothers rejoice over their growing smartness, and think them provided for. Not so! The apprenticeship ends; Mr. Renshaw does not feel a shadow of responsibility upon him as to their future fate, and their services are required no longer in the counting-house of Messrs. Renshaw and Brownlow.

Almost all the other great mercantile

houses are served in the same way; what is to become of those poor youths? Some of them who can scrape a little money together, open small offices for themselves—become commission agents, brokers, and other such crafts; of this number a proportion are successful—a proportion fail; and those who cannot scrape together any money—what becomes of them?

But no one can answer; they sink, and disappear; break the hearts, perhaps, of some few who loved them, and the world thinks of them no more.

Certainly, Mr. Renshaw thinks of them no more—feels his conscience as unsmirched as his snowy linen, in respect to them; it is his way—it is in the way of business, and when they have served his turn, what is it to him what becomes of them?

Hugh Melville occupies rather a high place in Mr. Renshaw's office. The youths have heard that he has a golden uncle, and speculate some times, and inquire of Hugh, whether "the old fellow" means to make him a partner? Mr. Renshaw himself is kind to Hugh. It is so easy to be kind to people, who have unmarried uncles with great fortunes.

One of the clerks who, like Hugh, has a widow mother with a young family dependent on her, has by special favour remained after his apprenticeship, and has Hugh's old Utopia, fifty pounds a-year. Alas! it makes but a poor Utopia this fifty pounds! for Hugh's own hundred has begun to shrink already.

The young man's name is Wood. Hugh becomes interested in him; but Wood is of

a yielding temper, and sometimes comes to the office with such a white sickly face, and such bloodshot eyes as grieve Hugh to the heart. This, however, happens very seldom, and it pleases Hugh when he can walk home with his new acquaintance, and see his mother's face watching for him at the window, and his little girl-sister run to open the door; while he, for his own part, learns to confide in Hugh.

But to this little household, trouble comes; long, wasting sickness—and one child dies. Poor Wood is very sad; his quarter's salary had been paid him just before, and it was so soon expended — so soon! And now, with some sick, and some convalescent, they are penniless.

Only fifty pounds a-year, and Mr. Renshaw overflows with wealth. To these

gloomy musings there comes the certain end. A letter for the firm enclosing money, falls into his hands. He is tempted, is overcome, and with such a fever burning in his heart, as was never there before, carries home money, and throws it into his mother's lap, telling her the rich merchant has sent it to her in pity.

But close upon the heels of the crime comes detection. The poor youth grows mad; morning after morning he comes to the office with bloodshot eyes and an unsteady step; and now the blood-hound has tracked him, and seizes on his guilt as its lawful prey. His *guilt*—it is that which stares him in the face like a spectre, and will not let him go; so that it is almost a relief to begin its punishment.

But Mr. Renshaw goes on his way, serene,

unmoved, virtuously judging and passing by. No finger of scorn can point to him; no slanderer brand him as unjust. He says he is sorry for the mother; but the words come only from his lips, and he never thinks—never thinks, the righteous upright man, that blame can lie upon him.

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you." Ah! so he does. If he stole, he will tell you, he would look to be punished; if he squandered, he should expect to come to want; and he shakes his head with blank politeness, and cannot see there is any difference, in a matter of principle, between fifty thousand and fifty pounds a-year.

For there never were sick children seeking bread from you oh! rich man—never temptations tugging at your heart—and to love

one's neighbour means to be on good terms with Mr. Brownlow—not always quite an easy matter; and to ask Mr. Smith to dinner—but it has no reference to one's young, misguided, and yet reclaimable clerks.

So Mr. Renshaw pays his hundred pound subscription to the New Infirmary, and hires another clerk at fifty pounds a-year—a poor man this, with a wife and children; and Mr. Renshaw's conscience is at ease, and he enters his office with the step of a prince—while those poor youthful souls—souls—though few of them remember it—look up to him as he comes and goes, and think him one of the greatest of mortal men.

CHAPTER VII.

"Dear Uncle Quentin,

"My father told me last Saturday night, that he was going to be married—perhaps he had told you before—at least you know it now. He was to be married on Tuesday, he said.

"I could not bear this, Uncle Quentin—how could I bear to have such a woman ruling over me? My aunt speaks of duty,

but what duty could there possibly be in that? I might have remained if I could have been of any use to my father; that would indeed have been greatly against my will, I confess; but it is possible there might have been duty there. He was forming a new connection for himself—he never needed me—and why should I stay?

"So Katie Guthrie travelled with me to Glasgow on Monday, and that night we slept in an honest poor house, where her sister lives. The next day she returned home; but first she came with me to the Liverpool steamer, and bade me good bye on the Broomielaw. I told you, perhaps, all this in the note I wrote with Katie, but I was in so great a hurry that I forget.

"We had a dreadful passage—the very sailors said it was a great storm, and I was

very ill. I never will go anywhere by sea again, if it is possible to help it, and never to India, Uncle Quentin, if I could have all India itself for the voyage.

"We were more than thirty hours on the water, and when we landed, I got one of their hackney coaches, and drove to my aunt's. My aunt of course was very much astonished, but she took me in so kindly, that I cried; I never cried much all my life—but I think half the tears I have ever shed, have been shed here—not for grief, but because they are so good to me.

"I like them all very much. I expect to be very happy with my aunt and Isabella. And I have begun to work, Uncle Quentin, though you said I could not; my aunt says bye and bye, when I am better accustomed to

it, that I will be as good a worker as Isabella.

"Uncle, I know what I would do, if I was as rich as you are! I would not let Hugh Melville waste his time in that office, where there is no one to understand him. I would take him down to Edinburgh, and give him a few hundred pounds to finish his studies. He should not be a clerk—people don't want such men for clerks; but we do want men like Hugh for our doctors. It is a great disgrace to my father and you, uncle—I can't help saying it—that Hugh has to give up his studies; and you need not think that you can get over this by laughing at me, for I know it's a great shame.

"My aunt and Isabella send their love to you, and bid me say that they are very

glad I am come; and begging that you will write me a word some times,

"I am,

"Dear Uncle Quentin,

"Your affectionate niece,

"ESTHER GREENLEES."

From this epistle, Esther rose considerably excited, and very much inclined to denounce her father and her uncle.

"It *is* a great shame! What is the use of being good and clever, if people are to be nothing but clerks?"

"You are not a clerk, Esther," said Isabella, laughing.

"Me? what about me? I am only Esther Greenlees; you know very well it is Hugh I mean."

"Ah! yes, it is well to be clever," said

Isabella; "very well; one enjoys it one's-self, though one were on a desolate island; and to be good, Esther—"

"Well, now to be good—here comes a lecture;—what is the use of being always good? Think of having summer continually—think of being constantly proper. Oh, Isabella! think of always wearing a white gown, and having a perpetual smile. Poor little baby! you will cry, though you have this robe on; you will tear this pretty muslin;—or if you don't, you are not like me!"

"Which it won't be, I hope, after all our work;" said Isabella.

"I wonder, now, what kind of a little thing will wear this;" continued Esther, "if it will be pretty — what like its mother will be—if we shall meet it, or see it any

time? It is so strange to be making a dress, and not knowing who is to wear it. Don't you think so, Isabella?"

"No, scarcely; I have made so many of late;" said Isabella.

"Hum, hum, hum; one wearies. I don't mean to say I'm tired of working, you know, Isabella; but just I was thinking of Greenlees;—down by the burnside, there is a little dell, as thick with moss and primroses as this is with stitches—that is saying a good deal, is it not?—and to sit under the rowan tree, and hear the water rippling away among the stones—I wish I could only take you there, Isabella?"

"I suppose, to make us both discontented;" said the graver cousin.

"I don't like contentment—it is dull—it is bad. I wish I could stitch better. I

wish—I wish—I do wish, Isabella,—I can't help it—that Hugh were at his studies again."

"Yes, no doubt;" said Isabella, not quite so earnestly, "but why are you so anxious, Esther?"

"Do you not see? A hundred young men could write letters; but Hugh is nobody in the office. I don't believe even Mr. Aikman knows he is clever."

"I think you are very much mistaken, Esther;" said Isabella, with a little displeasure. "Hugh is doing his duty, where Providence has placed him; and Mr. Aikman thinks nearly as much of him as we do."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Isabella;" said the wicked Esther, "you are human; you are angry. I have been a week here,

and I have never made you angry before; well done me!—but I wish Hugh were in Edinburgh, at College, for all that, Isabella."

"I don't wish Hugh were away from us;" said Isabella, a little sadly, "if we could save money enough to carry us all down to Edinburgh, to live there while he studied. Then, indeed!"

But Isabella left her sentence unfinished, and put very little heart in its implied wish; unconsciously, her eye fell upon the beautiful Rogers, lying on the writing desk, and reflecting the sunshine in its gilded leaves. She thought there were pleasant associations about this little parlour,—very pleasant, though she did not stay to ask herself what they were; and there were sad associations too, still dearer. Here, within

this little room, they had endured and overcome sorrow, and poverty, and hopelessness; and the battle-field was dear.

CHAPTER VIII.

That following summer was a memorable one in Liverpool—a time when Death went about through the miserable streets which swarmed in its meaner quarters, and instead of reaping one by one as is his use, mowed down the wretched inhabitants with that dreadful scythe of his, in hundreds at a stroke.

The fever year was not publicly marked,

like the plague visitations of old. People did not fly from it—did not meet you in the streets with panic-stricken faces—did not fall down in the death-agony before your eyes. The Exchange was as much thronged as ever—the fashionable streets as full. People went and came as usual; held rejoicings, merry-makings, feasts; and only some few signs told you that a deadly agency was at work among them.

For you heard people talk of the danger of infection, and newspapers were full of preventives. Something else, too, these newspapers recorded—every now and then, during that summer, the death of a Catholic priest; so that nine or ten, in all, of those functionaries were carried away violently out of the world, by the bright pestilential days of the fever year.

Let us do them justice, those nameless men; they believed that in their hands, they could carry salvation to those miserable victims of this, which was emphatically called the *Irish* fever. They believed that the extreme unction which they administered, was needful for the souls of the dying. They might be Jesuits, ready to defy every law, human and divine, for the will of their infallible Head; they might be the rude average men, to whom a cure of souls was an impossible occupation—it matters not; though they were fools even, they were heroes, for they believed and died.

And noiselessly, in uncommemorated multitudes, the dead were carried to their graves; upon the face of the town you saw no mark of it. Few rich people, few "respectable" people died of the fever; but in those sad

places near the river, where was, at all times, a visible Pandemonium, the mower was always busy; and as he strode along his field, you saw flowers, and the dew of the morning among the shorn grass which lay behind him—for he spared none.

And happy was it for the children, that he did not spare them; that he mercifully took them away, out of the visible mortal Hell they abode in, to the unseen world. You would have thought the race was exterminated, when you heard of the numbers who died out of those streets; but ere the winter came, they were as full as before.

The mother of Jane lived in a court, not far from Mrs. Melville's house. She was, in her way, a character. Only eighteen years older than her eldest daughter, this poor woman had lived through half-a-dozen lives;

had gone to Ireland with her master's family, out of one of the northern counties; at seventeen, had eloped with a soldier; had followed him for a year or two, through miseries which you shuddered to hear of, but of which she told you, with a natural wit and *naïveté* which had gained their edge in Ireland; had accompanied him to Liverpool, when he obtained his discharge; had quarrelled with, and separated from him at one time: at another had toiled for him with all her strength.

Hodgson had not always been an exemplary husband; but now, his wife vaunted Charlie's consideration, Charlie's fondness for his children, Charlie's regard for herself, and even Charlie's weakness of telling people "a bit of his mind," till her auditors were heartily weary of Charlie. They had four

or five little children; and Charlie had now got another situation with five-and-twenty shillings a-week. Mrs. Hodgson, in times of distress, of which she had known many, was a miracle of thrift; but in prosperity—and this was prosperity—her household was rather a profuse one.

Hugh Melville was alone in the little parlour, not very much to his satisfaction; but Esther had accompanied Isabella to "the shop," and Mrs. Melville was busy up-stairs. Hugh was hanging dreamily over his desk, with a pen in his hand; but the book on things in general was making no progress. Things in general!—for Hugh was beginning to look more closely at things in particular now—to dwell upon individual miseries—individual sins and misfortunes. He was no poet; but he had a share of the poetic tem-

perament, as many refined people have, who possess no productive genius. It eased his mind to revert from those particular things, which it was painful to contemplate, to the general and abstract, which excited only indignation; but it was not always easy to succeed in doing this.

It is a sad thing to think of the ruin of a young life—to watch a young soul go over the precipice, and sink into the abyss from which it may never rise; and Hugh Melville thought with unconscious bitterness of the glossy, spotless, irreproachable man, who never looked how the erring footsteps went astray, nor tried to put up fence or barrier around the palpable peril.

As he pondered, Hugh became sensible of a sound of weeping without the parlour door; in the silence it increased till he heard

loud broken sobs. It was Jane evidently. He opened the door and asked what was the matter.

Jane stood without, her coarse apron at her eyes, and with a tear-stained sorrowful face. "Oh, please Sir, aunt's took very bad at our house," sobbed Jane, "and mother said would you come and see her."

"What could I do—what is the matter, Jane," asked Hugh.

"I don't know, Sir—please mother's afraid it's the fever; but she said I wasn't to tell—and if you'd only come and see her, Mr. Hugh."

"But I could do nothing for her; send for a doctor," said Hugh, hastily.

"Mother's been for the parish doctor, but he said he couldn't come to-day, for he's busy; and oh! please Mr. Hugh, if you don't go, she'll die."

Hugh was in a great strait. It was true, that during two of his Edinburgh sessions at College he had attended the medical classes, and since had dutifully read a world of medical books, so that even now he might have passed a creditable examination. But Hugh felt the terrible responsibility of dealing with life, and trembled to use the knowledge which he felt to be so very little. This fever had interested his sympathies. There were such sad stories told of desertion of the sick who suffered from it, and such a universal dread of it possessed the poor.

"Mother's been for the parish doctor, and he won't come; and please we can't get any other doctor, for there's nobody to pay," said Jane, "and mother says, if you'd only come and look at her, and say if anythink would do her good: that there mightn't be reflections, mother said."

Hugh scarcely heard the words. He was debating with himself. Had he any right to hide his talent in a napkin—to keep the little knowledge he had, an unproductive thing. He threw down the pen he still held in his hand, and walked through the room anxiously. He might carry the pestilence into this house—might bring it to desolate his own fire-side. His mother—Isabella—Esther—should he not guard and protect them from all external evils, instead of bringing upon them such a deadly plague as this.

But Hugh clasped his hands together painfully, and thought again. Had he any right to avoid a duty, because it involved a danger. Dared he say to himself that he had no power of help—no knowledge which could aid this stricken woman? He dared

not—and with the cold dew breaking on his brow, and a prayer in his heart that his dedication might be accepted, and that God might preserve this house, Hugh Melville closed his desk and went away.

"I am going out—I shall not be long, mother," he called hastily to Mrs. Melville up stairs—and cautioning Jane not to tell his mother, he hurried out of the house.

Mrs. Melville came down wonderingly—where could Hugh have gone to—but she looked out upon the serene summer night, and thought he had only strayed forth to his Mount of Vision to enjoy the sunset there.

CHAPTER IX.

The sun is indeed in the west, but still high, and the waves blaze under the slowly retiring king. Along these suburban roads stray peaceful walkers—on the grass, the children are playing. With a soft rustling breath the trees fling their branches over you, and even the stunted hedge-rows of those much frequented fields are full of foliage, and here and there the questioning

eyes of childhood can find a precious wild-flower at their roots. The sunbeams slant over the teeming life of this breathing place, in which the rusty town disports itself, and the trees throw long shadows over the grass, turning their heads to the east as if in worship. There is in everything an indescribable emotion of rest and peacefulness. In the sky, with its deep blue arch, and beautiful sunny clouds, softened from the fiercer noonday shining—in the air, through which these sounds come dreamily, as if the golden medium which carries them to your ear, refined, and took all rudeness from them. And so sight and sound embrace, and twine about each other like two flowers—and you scarcely can tell of their blended beauty, which you hear, and which you see.

Along one side of the field runs a row of houses, just a little smaller and less dignified than the one in which Mrs. Melville lives. They have green painted railings in front like it, but with no flower plot, and in some of them the kitchen stair descends on the outside. There is only one line of houses, for the other side of the street is not yet built; and these little dwellings, with their green shutters, and railings, and open doors, are pleasant houses, looking out over the merry suburban field. At the lower end, the windows are very bright, and almost all have plants in the trim little parlour, which you can just get a glimpse of, through the flower-pots and fresh geranium leaves; but at the upper end, the houses look a shade less "respectable," and the children are more abundant, while here and there, in one of the

cellar kitchens—the outer stair descending to which is full of a little, merry, sun-burnt crowd — there are cakes and sweetmeats, crossed pipes and heaps of sand, displayed in beautiful confusion for sale.

Hodgson's house is at this upper end. In his parlour there is a display of plants, at his kitchen window hangs a great wicker cage, full of a large family of canaries, while two or three little dogs, and as many children, infest the stair to his kitchen. Upon the steps, which admit to his front door, stands Hodgson himself, his pipe in his mouth, and his coat off, discussing the affairs of the state, with a neighbour or two. A band of stripling lads, disreputable-looking, half-grown men, play quoits nearly opposite, and the children crowd so closely upon the narrow pavement, that you might as easily

walk among a swarm of bees as here, where some little, sun-burnt head must roll over into the causeway, for almost every step you take. Hodgson holds his pipe between his fingers, for the most part, as he leans over the green railing, and delivers a "bit of his mind," and now and then the neglected pipe demands a desperate suction to relight it, or has to be applied in brotherly helpfulness to that which glows under the nose of the mason on Hodgson's left hand, who smokes much more industriously, and has fewer bits of his mind to deliver.

In ordinary cases you would have seen Mrs. Hodgson also at the door, a little apart from her husband, with a baby in her arms, and a little cluster of neighbours exchanging experiences with her. To-night she is kept in, perforce, and Hugh Melville, making his

way with some difficulty through the dogs and the children, enters the kitchen.

Mrs. Hodgson has peculiar notions of cleanliness and order. It does not strike her that the aspect of her table is at all important, so long as the floor of her flagged kitchen is rubbed white with her favourite chalkstone, or that if her outer steps are clean, it matters much how her hearth is. This being her theory, the practice is correspondent; and though you step upon a white floor, you would have very little temptation, however cold the day was, to venture to the fire-side, or to receive refreshment from that table.

They have finished tea not long ago; so say the cups and saucers on the table—the great loaf and plate of butter which remain beside them—and Mrs. Hodgson has just

reappeared out of the back kitchen, with a cup of weak tea faintly steaming in her hand, when Hugh enters by the open door.

"She's very bad, Sir—awful bad; she wouldn't look at the tea after I took it to her," said Mrs. Hodgson, setting down the cup. "I've been obliged to lay her down on the old sofa in the back kitchen, for there isn't a place in the house but what we need ourselves; and though Charlie's very good, and never says a word again what I'd do for my own folks, it's not in reason, I should put him out of his own room, Mr. Hugh, to put Annie in."

"Does she always live with you?" asked Hugh.

"Bless you, no; poor thing, she lives no place regular. She's like a lost creature, my

poor sister; many's the sore heart we've had with her, and I doubt it's coming to an end."

"Let us hope not; let me see her immediately," said Hugh, "she may not be so ill as you think."

"Well, Sir, the Almighty's time's the best," said the woman, as she prepared to lead the way; "but I'm sure if she only was ready, it would be a mercy to take her. This way, Mr. Hugh."

They stepped through a dark passage, into which a darker stair descended, and which a half open door on either side, made a little difficult of navigation. A sound of quick feverish breathing, and a suppressed groan, reached Hugh's ear in the gloom; and now Mrs. Hodgson opens a third door, through which comes a faint ray of light, and says:

"Here she is, Mr. Hugh."

There she is, poor creature, covered with a dirty blanket, lying on the hard old-fashioned sofa. The back kitchen has, indeed, a small window in it, but in ordinary times receives the most of its light from the door, which constantly stands open, and from which a few steps ascend, to a little paved court behind; but now the door is closed, and the light, stealing in through those small and not very clean panes, penetrates the darkness like a clear cold frosty eye. Without, the rosy sunbeams carry life and warmth in their very appearance; within, this severe colourless light, which seems to glance down with a reproachful condemning look upon the sick woman's face, makes you shiver with sudden cold.

Her face is flushed and hot, and her

hands are restlessly working about her cap.

"Jane! you've put Mary Hodgson's cap on me. I know you have—it is one of her caps. Take it off, will you? I can't loose the strings. I've got no strength in my hands. Doctor—doctor—it's a woman's cap that died in the fever; make her take it off."

"It isn't, Annie—it's a good clean cap of my own, I tell you. Didn't Mary Hodgson's things go back to Staffordshire to her mother? It's a sister of Charlie's, as died a month since, Mr. Hugh, she means," added Mrs. Hodgson in an aside; "but she's out of her mind already; anyway, speak to her, Sir, for I wouldn't have a reflection on my mind after, that she had wanted ought—not for the world."

"I tell you it's Mary Hodgson's cap. God help me, I'll have the fever!" cried the poor woman. "Jane, you're a cruel woman! oh, you're cruel, cruel! more than me hasn't done, what they should have done; but you'd go and kill me—and I'm your own flesh and blood, Jane."

"Husht, Annie—well now, husht; speak to the gentleman, and you'll get something to do you good," said the sister, quailing before the fiery excited eye of the fever patient.

"There, *that'll* do me good," cried the sufferer, tearing the cap from her head, and throwing it on the floor, while a flood of brown hair, bursting from its confinement, covered the pillow she leaned on. "I won't have dead people's things on me. I won't—I'd die sooner. I used to have bonnie hair—

there isn't a gray thread in it yet—no more there should, for I'm not thirty—not thirty year old till Christmas; eh! to think what I've come through, and not been thirty year in this world."

"How do you feel?" inquired Hugh for the third or fourth time, seizing a momentary pause; "you must tell me how you are, or I can do you no good, you know. Come, my poor woman, let me feel your pulse."

"It's a strange world," said the patient musingly, "to think how many a one lives maybe as long as a hundred years, and never knows what trouble is; and to think of all I've come through in thirty: but Jane, Jane, I was as innocent as ere another girl in Cumberland till I was nigh twenty; all in ten year—all in ten year—and not a gray hair in my head yet. Jane, when I'm well,

I'll go back to my husband; bless you, he always liked me! and mind the house, and be that steady he'll never say a word—I will —you'll just see—and I think I'm better now!"

She threw off the blanket hastily and tried to rise, but only sank back again upon the pillow. She was, like her sister, a tall strong woman—a female athlete; but the vigorous limbs were bound more securely than with chains of iron. She could not move.

"Go and get a cap for her; leave me with her alone," said Hugh. "I can deal with her better so."

Exhausted with her previous struggles, the patient at last submitted to have her pulse felt. It throbbed so strongly under the pressure of his finger, that Hugh was almost

afraid of the wild power of life, which struggled in those boiling veins; but when he asked her how she felt, he could elicit nothing except a moan or a low cry of "Oh my head—my head!"

His presence, however, awed and subdued her; and while Hugh, anxious to go himself to get the necessary medicines, waited impatiently for the return of her sister, the poor woman fixed her feverish eyes upon him, and grasping her hair in her hands, threw sidelong glances at the cap, which she had thrown on the floor.

"Doctor," she said in a whisper, "do you think the like of that would give a body the fever? I'm most sure it's Mary Hodgson's cap; and—and I'd sooner cut off my hair than be in any danger—would that carry the fever, Doctor?"

"No, no; there is no fear," said Hugh.

"I'm not bad—nothing but my head. I'll soon be well: wouldn't you say that to Jane now, Doctor? when I couldn't hear; but you just want to frighten me."

"I don't want to frighten you; no, my poor woman—and I hope you may recover yet," said Hugh.

"Ay, ay," said the woman slowly, drawing her hair over her flushed cheek and closing her eyes; "and I'll go back to Joe, and I'll mind the child and keep the house tidy, and never spend a penny he doesn't know of. He's been a good man to me, has Joe, poor fellow, and now I'll make it all up to him. He'll have a clean hearth-stone to come in to, and the little lad at school, and never need to wait at meal-time; and we'll live as happy as the summer day."

Alas, the summer day! the wasted, unthought of, beautiful sunshine! Out of the night clouds has leapt one last ray to throw its light over a scene which never shall be—a penitent imagination—and she closed her eyes and a quivering smile came upon her lip; alas! for the life flutters at her heart, and it is a consciousness which she dares not acknowledge to herself, that this can never be, which paints so beautifully before her mind the recovered home.

The summer day!—it has not yet waned when Hugh hastily ascends those stairs, and hurries down the street to get the medicines, which he thinks may help her; here are little children spending the earliest hours of its morrow, almost before the sun of their life has risen—yonder are youths wasting its fairest prime. The summer day—the sum-

mer day! The words ring in Hugh Melville's ears, as he hurries through those squanderers of its sunshine; and in his heart the young man prays, with an impulse of love and pity. That they may awake to know how fair it is—how, fair as it is, the night comes, and the sky grows colourless over the drooping head, and the sick heart remembers all the possibilities it has lost—all the beautiful things which might have been. The tears swell into Hugh's eyes, and veil to him the glory of the sunset; he thinks of the humble home, which rises before that poor sufferer like a vision of angels—the home of restored love and virtuousness which in this world, for her, shall never be.

CHAPTER X.

"WHERE has Hugh gone to, I wonder?" said Esther Greenlees, looking from the window with some impatience; "if he wanted to go out, why didn't he come with us?"

"I suppose he is just walking," said Mrs. Melville; she looked very much puzzled.

"But he does not usually walk; what can have become of Hugh?" said the restless Esther.

"And this ought to be Mr. Aikman's night," said Isabella.

Mr. Aikman was late to-night; it was now nearly half past seven, and he had not yet made his appearance.

"Oh! to be sure he must have gone there; was it not stupid?" said Esther. "Isabella, let us have some music. There is no use for being dull only because they are away."

But *they* are not away; for here comes John Aikman's great shoulders and slightly flushed face, casting a shy glance over the little blind, and Esther, hastily closing again the piano, which she has half opened, runs to the door, and addresses Hugh's pupil instantly with her former question:

"Where is Hugh?"

"Is he not in?" said John.

"He must have run away—he must have fled somewhere," said Esther; "meanwhile, pray come in, Mr. Aikman. You need not stand at the door, and look at your Virgil, because Hugh is not here."

"Was I looking at my Virgil? he is not so handsome, I am sure," said John, who was by no means so shy with Esther as with her cousin, a fact which excited a little wonder in Isabella; "has Hugh stolen away clandestinely, Miss Greenlees; what is the matter."

"Nothing—nothing—except that he has gone out, and we are all wearying for him," said Mrs. Melville, interposing to prevent the possibility of his friend thinking Hugh blameable. "He never goes out, you know; he has spoilt us all."

"Isabella is going to sing; sit down,

Mr. Aikman," said Esther, dancing about as usual. "Give me the Virgil, I'll take care of him, for now we are going to have some music."

"We should rather have some work, Esther," said Isabella, unfolding a piece of the new supply, which they had just brought in.

"Well, sing your song first; Mr. Aikman has never heard you. Would you not much rather hear Isabella than me, Mr. Aikman? answer me honestly."

"Yes," answered the upright John.

Esther clapped her hands, and drew her cousin to the old piano—poor old piano! it was beyond the reach of surgery; but Isabella was glad of the pretext it gave her for turning her face away.

"My dear, you are playing false," said

Mrs. Melville, as Isabella's fingers ran faintly over the invalid keys.

"No, aunt," said the apologetic Esther, "it's only the broken note. Never mind the piano, Isabella, sing."

And Isabella sang. Isabella was self-conscious—was conscious moreover, that a pair of eyes behind her, fixed themselves on her hair, and that the face to which they belonged, wore a flush of colour which was seldom visible upon it, save in this little room; so Isabella sang tremulously—was sometimes irresistibly impelled to laugh, and sometimes could have cried; but it might have done her good service, had she known that John Aikman, for the hundredth time, was deciding to his own perfect satisfaction that she had red hair.

"Red hair; but not so red as her

cousin's," pronounced John; and he heard no blunders in Isabella's song. On the contrary, he thought those tremulous notes were fine and moving; but immediately he checked his thoughts. "She had nearly laughed just then," said John, with an intuition, "is it at me, I wonder? but she sings far better than her cousin."

The ungrateful John! Esther had set a chair for him, had carried off his Virgil; had prevailed on Isabella to sing for his special gratification. If she only could have known how her disinterested services were rewarded!

When Isabella's song was over, John said nothing. He withdrew his eyes from her with a start, when she rose, and began to turn over the leaves of a book on the table; but not the faintest word of praise opened

the lips of John Aikman. Mrs. Melville was piqued just a little. Isabella herself thought she must have sung very badly indeed. There was rather an awkward pause.

"Now, there is the work. I suppose I must succeed you, Isabella," said Esther, springing from the table; "and surely before I am done, Hugh will be here."

Mrs. Melville was becoming anxious about Hugh. She could not imagine any cause for such an unusual proceeding—without a word of explanation, too; and as she sat beside John Aikman, and observed his eyes wander from his book to the work in Isabella's hand, and linger on it, as if it interested him, it was some time before her perplexed, uneasy thoughts became aware of any meaning in those glances.

"Esther sings very prettily; do you not

think so?" said Mrs. Melville, vacantly, as Isabella rose to bring a little work-box from the other corner of the room.

"Yes, I suppose so;" said John with a kindred abstraction — for his mind had followed Isabella to wonder what she wanted with the box. "I fancy it is very well; but it's not like Miss Melville. I beg your pardon;" exclaimed John, starting as he discovered what he had said, "I mean—but there, at last, is Hugh."

Esther stopped in the middle of a verse, and ran to the door: "We thought you had eloped—where have you been? give an account of yourself, Hugh."

Hugh entered the room exceedingly unlike a man, who had been walking for pleasure. His face was very grave, and much paler than usual; and there was an

evident confusion and embarrassment in his manner, the sight of which made his mother tremble with indefinite fears;—what had he been doing? where had he been?

"Just now, I have been watching a game of cricket, and my range of vision embraced also a band of quoit players, and a variety of smaller amusements; I daresay you could tell the names of them all, Esther. You were a child just the other day, you know; whereas I—"

But Hugh's gaiety, though it did not appear unnatural, seemed out of harmony with his feelings.

"You don't look as if you had been watching games;" said Esther, "does he, aunt? But I suppose you have been philosophizing upon them—is that it?"

Mrs. Melville looked at her son;—the

colour rose high upon his cheek for an instant, and the mother's heart grew sick within her. Had he—her pride—her hope—her only son—told her what was not true?

"I daresay I look grave enough, mother;" said Hugh, meeting her eye frankly, with truth in his face, "for I heard just now, that this fever was making its appearance in one of these little streets. The people tell sad tales of it. I heard it from Jane's mother; I saw her when I was out."

Mrs. Melville drew a long breath, and felt an unspeakable weight lifted from her heart. It was this that made Hugh look so pale.

"If you met Jane's mother," said she, cheerfully, "the wonder is, not that you are so late, but that you are so soon, Hugh;—we have been wearying, though."

"Especially Mr. Aikman;" said Isabella, under her breath.

"Especially me;" said Esther, "don't believe Isabella, Hugh, Mr. Aikman never missed you."

"I beg your pardon, Melville; Miss Greenlees is always correct—but I did miss you;" said John laughing, "though I was waiting with the greatest resignation."

"It was me, Hugh—me; nobody wearied for you but me;" said Esther, sitting down to work, "and now, there is your Virgil; for, you see, nobody asks *me* to sing—not even Isabella."

CHAPTER XI.

It is late, and everything is silent in Mrs. Melville's little house. They are all resting quietly, in the peaceful sleep which prayer has blessed and sanctified. Only in one window there still shines a faint light, and one heart is solemnly awake, communing with itself and God.

Hugh Melville is seated by the table, supporting his brow on both his hands.

Before him lies an open Bible, and his candle dimly reveals the plain furniture, and unadorned walls of the little room. His fingers clasped together cover his eyes; his lips move sometimes as if in vehement entreaty; but no sound breaks the stillness. His heart within him is greatly troubled; two paths lie before him, one of which he must choose, and he is asking counsel of God.

God, who has given some knowledge to him — some instruction in the means of healing. The Lord, the Physician, whose glorious life on earth was dedicated to this, and who forgot not the miseries of the body, even in His Divine occupation with the greater malady of the soul. To ask Him for counsel; to bend a throbbing head over that wonderful record, wherein it stands that

never man went unhealed away out of His presence; that never voice of human anguish fell unheeded upon His ear—what could the result be? One or two great tears fell from Hugh's eyes upon the book which lay before him; a wonderful panorama glanced through his kindled spirit; the beggar by the wayside who now is blind no longer; the palsied man, freely passing through the crowd, which hindered his bearers an hour ago, from carrying him to the Saviour's feet; the father, under the hill's shadow, meeting Him who comes from the glory of the Transfiguration, with the agony of that prayer, "If thou canst do anything." If thou canst do anything, weak mortal follower of this marvellous man who is God—if thou canst so much as soften one pang—wipe off one drop of that heavy dew of pain—extend

for one day the time of possibility, of prayer, of hope; if thou canst do anything—anything! how wilt thou dare answer to thy Master if thou doest it not?

Reverently Hugh Melville closed his Bible, henceforth no longer to hesitate and doubt; to fear for his own skill, or for the danger to this house; but in the Lord's strength to do what he can, and to look for a blessing.

For again these words ring in his ear—the summer day. The summer day has ended, fair as it began; the beautiful tints of the sunset have gone out of the sky, and the stars shine serenely, and the wakeful night watches like a sentinel, while through the stillness you can hear such a sound as her footsteps might have, moving to and fro upon her mystic guard. So to live as the fair day—so to depart as the sun departed—so

to be followed as by this solemn, quiet night—and with those thoughts in his heart, Hugh Melville sleeps, all his doubts lying at rest within him—sleeps and wakes on another golden morrow, ready and girded for his labours.

On his way to his office, he called upon his patient. She was for the moment asleep—a feverish, restless sleep, out of which his finger on her pulse awoke her, into a dozing, half-raving state, and Hugh could not deny to himself that she was visibly worse.

With a great terror and dread of having treated her improperly, or at least of having failed in adopting sufficiently stringent means, Hugh urged her sister to send for another doctor, and if possible to remove the poor woman to a less miserable apartment. To the first she gave a tardy, unwilling consent

the second, she said, was impossible—for who would dare to carry a fever-patient up those steep, dark stairs?

The business of the office was unusually tedious to Hugh that day; and when at last he was released, late in the afternoon, he took a cab, though the few scanty shillings in his pocket could ill afford such an indulgence, and drove to the house of a well-known and benevolent physician. Dr. Langstaffe was fortunately at home.

"I do not know how to explain the great liberty I have taken," said Hugh, hurried and out of breath, as the grave physician received him. "I am a medical student, Sir, and last night was called upon to visit a poor woman, lying sick of this fever. I am not properly qualified, Dr. Langstaffe; my education is only half completed, and I

am now in an office; but no doctor could be got to attend the woman, and I thought I might possibly be of service to her. I went and prescribed for her last night. This morning I found her worse. The responsibility weighs dreadfully upon me; will you accompany me to see her, Doctor, and tell me if the fault is mine? I am very bold, I know, and have no right—but it is life and death."

Hugh wrung his hands, and looked eagerly into the face to which he appealed. It was a composed face, with kindness in the intelligent grey eyes; but Dr. Langstaffe was an experienced man, and did not immediately bestow his confidence on a stranger.

"Have you practised before? where have you studied?" he asked shortly, though with politeness.

"At Edinburgh," answered Hugh breathlessly. "I have never practised before, but I thought I understood this fever, and that I might possibly do some good, if I found I could treat it. I beg you, Sir, to make my mind easy on this point. If I have endangered this miserable life, it will embitter all my own."

"What did you prescribe?" asked the physician.

Poor Hugh, shaking with emotion, answered tremulously, fixing his eyes upon the face, as if this was a judge pronouncing sentence on him; and it was with a strong revulsion of hope and courage, which brought the tears to his eyes, that he listened to the verdict.

"Very judicious. I think just what I should have ordered. You have a cab, I

see," said Doctor Langstaffe. "I will go with you to see your patient."

But Doctor Langstaffe little knew—little thought, as Hugh, with a flush of joy, attended him into the humble vehicle, that there would not remain a single coin in Hugh Melville's pocket, when he had paid this cab; or that already his brain was racking itself with calculations, as to how he could possibly gather enough to pay the physician's fee.

At the head of the street they left the vehicle. By this time the good doctor had extracted from his companion a considerable part of his history; and it was with genuine friendliness, and kind interest, that he took the youth's arm now, as they descended the steep street.

The patient was delirious—raving of the

return, which now she never could accomplish, to her home, her husband, and her child; and pitiful it was to hear those words, describing the little household comforts, the wife's humble cares, the mother's renewed solicitudes, falling from the lips of the dying. Sometimes it seemed, she fancied herself in her little kitchen—sometimes happily sending away "the little lad" to school—sometimes bewailing herself, who had "come through" so much in thirty years. Thirty years! it should have been the full noontide of the summer day; but now it was its disastrous close.

Dr. Langstaffe examined Hugh's prescriptions carefully, asked some questions, and at last, laying his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder, led him to the outer room.

"My young friend," said the doctor,

"your first patient will die; but you must not for a moment blame yourself. I should have done exactly what you did, and quite approve of your treatment; but this poor creature is doomed—it is impossible to save her."

Hugh had expected this; but the dread responsibility overpowered him. He was still only a youth; he hid his face in his hands.

"Go on; you must not let this discourage you," continued his new friend. "In our profession, we must be braced to bear everything; and, putting feeling aside, we are greatly privileged when we can mitigate suffering. I see you will prosecute this: do not think of yourself, of pain, or doubt, or responsibility. These means which you have used are good and wise means. Think

of the sufferer, and let your mind so exert itself for him, that you shall have no leisure to feel for yourself. I shall be glad to give you my advice, when you need it: let me see you again. Good-bye."

Hugh stammered, hesitated, did not know how to allude to the fee, which, poor fellow, he had not to give.

"I take no fee for such visits as this," said Dr. Langstaffe, pointedly. "Good-bye."

CHAPTER XII.

"MUST I die, Doctor?"

It was a solemn question, and in this momentary lull of the delirium, the patient fixed her brilliant eyes upon Hugh Melville's face, as if he held the power of life and death in his hands.

"My poor woman," he said, gently but with deep solemnity; "I cannot deceive you. You may never see another morning—you must die."

A sudden shudder passed over the face of the sufferer; her very soul seemed to shrink from the sentence.

"I would have gone back. I'd have been a good wife to Joe, and a good mother to the little lad. Oh, Doctor, save me! maybe I haven't been what I ought, but ne'er a one knows, that hasn't suffered it, how hard it is to live a bad life. Oh, you folks that never knew what it was to do wrong!—but, Master, I've heard say we're all sinners."

"And so we are indeed," said Hugh.

"But I tell you it's hard to sin—you that think there's pleasure in it; it's bitter hard to lead a bad life. Won't you save me, Doctor? I'll go down on my knees to you. I'll bless you every hour of my life. Doctor, Doctor, save me to go home!—to make it up to them all!"

And the unhappy woman tottered from her bed, and threw herself on her knees at Hugh's feet, gazing up in his face with such a look of agonized entreaty, as struck him to the heart.

"Oh, Annie, can't you be resigned?" said the sister; "it's not the gentleman that can save you—it's God; and, when it must be, you ought to submit, and try to be ready. I'll send for the minister, Annie."

"I will do all I can for you," said Hugh, raising his poor suppliant to her miserable couch; "but there is no power in man to help. It is God alone who can aid either in body or mind. My poor woman, this world is closing upon you—I can give you no hope; but there is another world—an everlasting refuge from all sin and trouble; and One is there, who has suffered infinite grief

for such as you. You have heard of the Saviour, Annie?"

"Bless you, yes, Sir; she's heard of good, though she never did it much," said Mrs. Hodgson. "We were all brought up going constant to the Meeting, down in Cumberland; oh, it's not for want of learning she's gone astray."

"I've gone astray," said the patient, closing her eyes languidly. "I've brought shame on all my folks, and lost myself; and now I've got to die — to die. O God! it can't be true! and me not thirty year old till after Christmas-day!"

"Annie, husht; I've sent for the minister," said her sister; "and you must just be resigned and content. It's not been such a grand world to you, poor thing, that you should be sorry to go out of it at the last."

"I'd be glad to go if it was to sleep," murmured the stupified woman; "I'd be as content as a baby if it was just the grave; but Jane, Jane, the fire and the torments and the gnashing of teeth—O God! that I should come to this at last! But if I've done wrong, I've suffered, Doctor—no mortal knows what I've suffered—and maybe for that I'll be forgiven."

"You'll be forgiven for the Saviour's sake, Annie; there never was a sinner so great that He could not pardon. Shall I read to you what He says."

"The minister's coming, Mr. Hugh," said Mrs. Hodgson.

"Fetch Joe," cried the patient hoarsely; "fetch him, and I'll ask him to forgive me; and fetch the little lad—fetch him, Doctor, that I may see him before I die."

Not knowing what to do, distracted and anxious, Hugh at last left the death-bed, to obey this last entreaty. As he left the house he encountered Mr. Ford.

"*You* here, Mr. Hugh," exclaimed the minister. "Is it really the fever—that dreadful Irish fever? and I suppose one cannot approach the patient without danger of infection."

"The disease *is* infectious," said Hugh. "Mr. Ford, I do not wish my mother to know that this woman is my patient, because imagination helps the infection. Will you be so good as to preserve my secret? it is, I think, a very innocent one."

Mr. Ford promised cordially, and with some evident trepidation descended the stairs. The good man was not without courage; but, though he would not desert

his duty, this danger shook his fortitude not a little.

And Hugh went away towards the closer and more unwholesome quarters of the town, to seek the forsaken husband of this unhappy woman. She was evidently very near death, and there was no one in the house, who could be sent with the message; so, with a terror in his heart lest his mother's suspicions should be roused, he hurried away on his painful errand.

The husband lodged in a court, in one of the densely populated streets descending to the docks. It was a close unwholesome place, where ten houses, and more than as many families, were crowded into a space little more than sufficient for one healthful habitation. "Joe" was only a lodger, and had a dark ill-savoured room on the first floor, which

served him for all purposes. His poor little neglected boy was playing in the street, and he himself stood among a group of loungers, at the entrance of the court.

"Your wife is ill, and desires to see you," said Hugh hurriedly, as the man's landlady conducted him through the court, a narrow flagged passage about two yards broad, which separated the opposite rows of houses: "I beg that you will go at once, and let her see her son while she is able to recognize him."

"My wife is ill! what's that to me?" said the man, with a coarse laugh; "she's been ill many a time, and will be many more, I suppose, in the old way. Oh, let her alone—she'll not be long before she's well enough to plague the life out of me again."

"She is so ill that she must die; I do not expect her to survive this night," said Hugh.

"Well, let her die; it's the best turn she could do me," answered the husband, turning carelessly away.

"The poor woman is deeply penitent. I do not know what her faults are, but I have seen her repentance," said Hugh, whom all this impressed and excited greatly; "and she begs to see you and the child before she dies. I do not know what injury, she may have done you during her life, but you cannot surely refuse her prayer from her death-bed. I beg that you will go and see her. It is your forgiveness she prays for."

There was something of superiority implied in the last words, which subdued the

rude nature a little. His forgiveness! yet he too had deeply injured *her*.

"What's the matter with her?" asked the man rudely.

Hugh hesitated, fearing that this would altogether crush the faint consent.

"It is fever," he said at last.

The group of listeners dispersed, and recoiled; the husband uttered a great curse.

"And she's sent for me that I might take it!" he exclaimed furiously. "Tell her I'll see her—"

"I can bear no cruel message to her," said Hugh, with authority. "If you commission me with any charitable words, I will take them—not otherwise."

The fellow quailed before Hugh's pale face, and air of suppressed excitement, and

with a laugh of assumed scorn turned away.

"Ah, he's a brute!" exclaimed one of the women, "but she's as bad; a woman that's bad's always worse than a man; there's not a good one between them."

Just then a door opened behind. It was in one of the small houses fronting to the street, two of which interposed between each court. A woman wrapped in a faded shawl, and with a widow's bonnet closely encircling her pale and anxious face, came down the steps with a humble, broken, deprecating look, which argued a heavier burden even than poverty. She was just gliding past, when her eye fell on Hugh. She hesitated for some time, and a painful flush rose to her face; but at last, as she advanced a step to speak to him, Hugh remem-

bered who she was. The mother of poor Wood.

"We are in great distress, Mr. Melville," said the widow; "one of my children has taken ill. I cannot tell what it is, but I dread and tremble lest it should be the fever; it is little Helen, the one who had the scarlet fever not long since, when—when poor Henry—oh, Mr. Melville!"

"Is he well? have you heard from him?" said Hugh, sympathetically.

"Well as a man can be in such a position as his," said the widow; "but oh, Mr. Melville, it was not dishonesty—it was not crime. We were very poor; my dear unhappy boy was tempted and fell. Oh, Mr. Melville, believe me, he never meant to wrong his master."

And with the Jesuitry of the heart—the

bitter defence of love which still could not deny to itself the sin, which wrung its very soul—the poor mother clasped her hands, and gazed appealingly into Hugh Melville's face.

"I believe it, I perfectly believe it," said Hugh; "and those who are blamed by none have a greater share of the sin, than he who bears all its punishment. I believe so fervently."

The widow wiped her eyes, and yet again wept and sobbed with gratitude.

"Thank you, thank you," she repeated in broken tones. "You are the first who has spoken mercifully of my poor boy—my poor boy! he is no less dear to me, Mr. Melville. Oh, more! more! for he needs me more than ever; but now I must go away for a doctor to see my little girl.

Thank you, Mr. Melville—thank yo thank you ! Good night."

"Stay, I have myself studied medicine," said Hugh. "I have began to treat this fever; let me see your little girl, Mrs. Wood; if you will trust her in my hands, I can save you expense. Let me see her, at least."

The widow turned, and looked anxiously into his face.

"Can you—can you, Mr. Melville? dare you venture? May I trust my child's life to you? The expense—it is indeed a great matter to me; but my poor little Helen—I would work night and day, before I would risk my little girl!"

"Yesterday Dr. Langstaffe, one of the most eminent physicians in the town, approved of my treatment, and encouraged me

to go on," said Hugh rapidly. "If I cannot venture, I will not; believe me I am not reckless of life: but let me see the child."

Without another word the widow turned and knocked softly at the door; it was opened by the mistress of the house, who abode in state in the parlour, and evidently looked down with the utmost contempt upon her lodger, whom she admitted with a remark, quite loud enough to be heard, on "the trouble some folks were always giving." When they had only half ascended the narrow stair, this woman called after them in an elevated voice:

"Mrs. Wood! if that child's going to have the fever, or anything of that sort, I won't have her in my house. Mind, I won't. She shall pack off to the infirmary,

the right place for such sickly creatures, or I won't be bothered with the lot of you. I won't, and that's all."

Meekly the poor widow received this tirade, and turning, proceeded to the door of her room. One room, and she had three children; and there lay the fevered girl.

"Mother, have I the fever?" said a small tremulous voice, as they entered. "Oh mother! mother! do you think I'll have to die and leave you? I can't leave you to work alone! I can't, I can't, mother!"

"Hush, my darling. God grant it be not His will to take you now; but if it is, Helen, we must submit. Here is a gentleman come to see you; perhaps it's not the fever, dear. Mr. Melville will tell us, Helen."

It *was* the fever; it was impossible to mistake the symptoms; but strangely different from the woman which was a sinner, was this mild patient child, who had no fear, except that her mother might be left to work alone.

The little girl was thirteen years old, but great adversity and affliction had matured the child almost into a woman. Blue serious eyes, which had wept the bitter tears of full developed life; a white thin cheek, which care already had nipped and paled in its budding; and a poor little aching head, which every now and then checked its uneasy motion on the pillow, for the mother's sake, who followed every turn with such anxious heart-broken looks.

"Don't mind being hard, Sir," said the little patient, looking up into Hugh's face,

and speaking in a whisper. "Don't mind the physic being bad to take—only make me well, that I may help my mother, for she can't do it all herself; make me well, Doctor—if, if—"

"If it is the will of God," said Hugh, gravely. "Yes, Helen, I will spare no pains."

Hugh wrote his prescription with a trembling hand; he could not now go himself to bring those medicines—he had not the means, poor fellow; and a bitter blush overspread his face as he remembered, that he could not help them—could not help them with so much as the cost of this medicine; for hitherto a very small amount of pocket-money had sufficed Hugh, and the few shillings which he kept from his quarter's salary—the boy's store of splendid shillings—

had been abundantly enough for him; while, with their increased household, the magnificence was considerably faded from the hundred pounds a-year.

So he himself waited, while Mrs. Wood took his prescription, and hurried out for the medicine. There were only pence in the widow's pocket; and Hugh saw her lift up a little frock which lay upon a chair, and turn her back to him while she wrapped it up. He saw her carry it away under her shawl, and he almost could have wept; but the widow was far beyond weeping for such a thing as this. She went away with it calmly—little Helen's frock—but it must purchase the remedy which might save her life.

"Mr. Melville—Mr. Melville, didn't you know our Henry?" whispered the child.

"Yes, Helen."

"He was very good to us all, Mr. Melville. He didn't mean to do wrong; my mother says it was very wrong to yield to temptation. I know, so it was; but Mr. Melville, he didn't mean it. Oh! poor Henry—poor Henry!"

"God will help and restore him, Helen, if you pray for it," said Hugh. "Men are hard and cruel to each other; it is only what is done we see, you know; but God knows all that is resisted, and God is far more merciful than man."

The child did not speak for some time; then Hugh saw her lips move, and heard her say faintly, "for Jesus' sake."

For Jesus' sake—the heart of the young physician swelled within him. Grief, disgrace, extreme poverty, were all darkening like so

many clouds over this little household; but under all these—nearer than all these—shone the radiant wings of the cherubim, guarding the white throne of grace and mercy, on whose steps no soul may fear to kneel, who says, "for Jesus' sake."

The little girl held out her hand. "Thank you, Mr. Melville. Henry used to speak of you. I cannot tell you how good he was to us—he used to give little Tom and Mary their lessons at night, and set my copy for me. Oh! Mr. Melville, do you think he will ever come back?"

"I think so, Helen. I think he is sure to come when you pray for him so; but now your mother is coming—you must be brave, like a good girl, and keep up your heart. Don't let your little brother and sister come near you,

Helen, and try to keep yourself as quiet as possible; you must not even think of Henry: when you are well you will have plenty of time for that. All this is for your mother's sake—you must think of her and of yourself now."

The widow entered immediately. Helen was lying very quiet, with a smile upon her face: the kind words had done her good.

"Would it be possible for you to send the other children away?" said Hugh, drawing the widow aside, as he prepared to leave.

"Not possible—not possible, Mr. Melville," said Mrs. Wood, with a look of alarm. "Will they be in danger? But I cannot send them away."

"Then let them be out as much as

possible," said Hugh; "say nothing to them to alarm them, but do not let them come near Helen; and it is unnecessary, I think to let it be known, that this is the fever. There is no use for saying anything about it. I hope Helen will get over it soon; now don't come down stairs with me—let no stranger into the room. I shall see your landlady, I suppose, at the door."

He was right. Within her parlour Mrs. Smith lay in wait for the doctor. He was very young—he was no doubt a beginner—she thought she could bully him.

"What's the matter with the child?" she asked rudely.

"If I told you, I dare say you would not be much the wiser," said Hugh. "If you are interested in her, I am glad to be

able to tell you that she is not very ill, and will soon get better, I hope."

"What is the name of her illness?"

"It's name is a Latin name; you would not understand it."

Hugh's smile reassured the woman; she withdrew within the shelter of her own door, and looked less impertinent. He was by no means so confident, as he said he was; but he knew that to remove the child now would be certain death, and he hoped by the means he had instructed Mrs. Wood to use, to preserve the house from infection.

He hurried immediately to his first patient. Mr. Ford had not long since left her; and with a thrill of solemn awe he heard that she was dead. Dead, and the natural tears already frozen in her sister's eyes; while

her husband, thankful for the riddance, would rejoice when he heard of it, and not one heart among all her kindred would regret that she was gone. But if none else wept for the sinner, her young physician wept for her, and with deep reverence and trembling, looked upon her remains. Her *remains*—where was herself then? But no one dared ask that terrible question.

CHAPTER XIII.

"CAN you give me a few shillings, mother?" said Hugh Melville, some time after, with a slight embarrassment.

"Surely, Hugh."

But Mrs. Melville contracted her brow with sudden pain, as she took out her purse, and spread the contents before him. These contents were not very great; but it was a frugal household, and there still

remained two or three gold pieces of the quarter's supply.

She said nothing—she only held the money before him; and Hugh, blushing deeply—so deeply, that the blood again rushed back upon his mother's heart, with a pang she had never known before—took one half-sovereign from the little heap.

And so he went away. It was another beautiful morning—fresh, and full of sunshine; but Mrs. Melville hurried from the little parlour, and sought her own room with a sick heart. For three or four successive nights, Hugh had returned very late—had come in exhausted—grave, pale—certainly as no man could have returned from a meditative evening walk.

The poor mother could not tell what to think. Labouring to account to herself

every night for his absence, she had heard every night with positive agony the embarrassed, confused excuses which he made; had seen the blush on his face, and the eye which wandered about on every trifling object in the room, rather than meet her scrutiny; and the love within her, jealous and fearful, interpreted these signs into marks of guilt and untruth. Untruth and guilt! it would have killed her to say these words; yet unsaid, unspeakable, they were in her heart.

This morning had given a strange confirmation to her suspicions; for Hugh, with his perfectly simple tastes, had never needed money before. Money!—but that poor half-sovereign was money to the widow, though she would gladly have given all at this moment — gladly have embraced

want, labour, trouble—anything which would restore to her, her confidence in her only son.

Her only son!—*his* only son! Hugh Melville's pride, and joy, and hope; and the poor mother groaned aloud as she said it was well—well that the father had departed in time to retain full trust in his boy; and as she remembered that father's exulting love, her heart sunk deeper and deeper, and with an inarticulate cry, she looked to God; an inarticulate cry, seeking deliverance from she knew not what danger—pardon for she knew not what sin—salvation, rescue, for him—any chastisement, any affliction, any misery, but this!

She became calmer after her prayer, incoherent as that prayer was. She resolved to ask Hugh, as his mother had a right

to do, what it was which enticed him night after night from his home. His home! —the home which John Aikman envied him—the home which he himself had prized above everything else on earth—what could the enchantment be?

She had newly wiped from her cheek those tears—the bitterest which, amid all her griefs, she had ever shed—when the door opened softly, and Isabella came in with a quiet, hesitating step. Isabella knew her mother's face too well, not to be able to read its changes, and *her* heart too began to tremble. They had never exchanged words on the subject, except indeed that Isabella had said again and again, in those weary evening hours before he returned: "Mother, what can keep Hugh?" and the mother had faltered forth excuses for

him; but Isabella knew that on this morning, the mother and son had been alone together, and that, when Hugh went out, Mrs. Melville hurried up stairs. She thought there had been some explanation between them—some unravelling of the mystery.

With a hesitating step, she advanced:

"Mother, what is the matter?"

"There is nothing the matter, my dear," said Mrs. Melville, hastily rising from her seat, and turning away her face, as she began to arrange some books on the table, that Isabella might see no trace of her tears.

"Mother, have you been speaking to Hugh? You are not angry with Hugh, mother?"

"Angry! why should I be angry, Isabella? There never was a more dutiful son—there never was a kinder brother.

What should make me angry at my dear boy?"

Poor Mrs. Melville! if she could have heard the other widow, just thus lavishing her tenderness upon the poor guilty son, whose sin was no imagination—covering with all his good qualities the one blot, which she could not hide, and when these would not do, throwing the rich mantle of her love over all.

"I thought you were displeased, mother," faltered Isabella; "I thought you looked grieved; I thought— but it must be business which keeps Hugh so late at night."

"God knows!" murmured Hugh's anxious mother.

"Mother! you know something — you have heard something! It breaks my heart, this. Tell me what it is."

"Isabella, my dear, I cannot tell you,"

said Mrs. Melville. "I do not know myself. He has never disobeyed me—there never has been an appearance, the slightest, of any wish to deceive us. Why should we distrust your brother, Isabella? why should we be suspicious of him for such a thing as this?"

Isabella's eyes were fixed on her mother's face: she was not satisfied.

"Why?—I cannot tell why; but you *are* suspicious, mother."

"If it continues," said Mrs. Melville, "I must speak to him—perhaps I will speak to him to-night; and if I do him wrong, God forgive me, Isabella. I hope—I believe I do—and I will try to set all at rest to-night."

They parted so, each with a heavier heart — each overpowered with a deeper grief,

because the other entertained the same fears, and trembled with the same suspicions. The mother felt her doubts increased, when she saw that they had an existence, too, in the mind of her daughter; and Isabella, to whom her mother's judgment was an unfailing rule, bowed her young head in the bitterest despondency. Hugh, her brother, whom her heart had throned in excellence—the first and best, to whom everything was possible — that Hugh should fall — Hugh!

And prayers intense and terrible—prayers which left the suppliants exhausted and weak, as if all the force of their hearts had been compressed into those petitions—ascended for him to Heaven; and his heart, grave with the sight of trouble, but unshadowed and unembittered by the evil-doing

they feared, grew strong and manful in his breast, hour by hour, under the dew and the sunshine which God sent down out of His bountiful skies. It was a cruel deceit they practised on themselves—it may be there was cruelty in Hugh's care of them; but while he started and trembled for every head-ache, any of them complained of, he did not realize the far sorer heart-ache, which his regard for their bodily health brought upon them.

The evening came—came with a solemn brightness, which to Mrs. Melville and her daughter seemed to have something terrible in it, like a night of doom. It had been very hot and sultry all day, and now the sunshine edged with a border of gold a great tumultuous thunder-cloud, which came gradually rolling over their heads, and blotting

out the clear breadth of sky which it had been a relief to look upon. They were all very silent, as they sat together in the little parlour, where Jane was now setting the tray for tea, while the other part of the table, covered by a snowy table-cloth, bore preparations for the late dinner of Hugh. His usual hour—his proper hour of return, was drawing very nigh; but none of the watchers, though two of them, at least, grew sick and faint at every footstep in the street, and the third was little less anxious, expected him to come.

For these few days had been painful days to Esther Greenlees. Half guessing, and yet not perfectly understanding the cause, which made her aunt and her cousin so grave and silent, the impatient Esther had been by no means happy. The gradual softening pro-

cess which had been taking place upon her, made her feelings only the more acute now; she felt herself in the way—preventing unrestrained intercourse—preventing, perhaps, the family frankness which would have led to an explanation on Hugh's part; and several times, on those dim unhappy nights, Isabella had been constrained to seek Esther in her own room, where she sometimes now sat still so long as an hour—Esther, to whom ten minutes' quietness was unendurable—pondering what she should do; whether at all risks, painful as it must be, she should return to Greenlees.

Six o'cloek! —Hugh Melville is not here —he is standing by the bedside of little Helen Wood, almost ready to weep as he sees the crisis pass; the crisis pass—the life saved! Ah, joy and happiness unspeakable!

to be the instrument which God's hand uses, to preserve a much-needed life.

Half-past six !—Mrs. Melville cannot rest, cannot keep in her hand the mechanical work, at which all day her fingers have laboured, leaving her thoughts far too free for peace. Her anxiety is redoubled to-night, for she feels that this is a crisis too.

Softly she has opened the door — softly, lest Isabella should hear, and be troubled. Who is this coming up the street, with his light step, his young, fresh, ingenuous brow, which never knew what the shame of falsehood was? Hugh! — thank God! — Hugh!

"Here is Hugh coming," said Mrs. Melville—she could scarcely command her voice to say so much; and the hearts of both leaped, as Isabella ran to the window, to see

him, and Esther more quietly than usual, made some unconscious improvement in the garniture of the table. Here is Hugh, indeed, and his subdued happiness in his work of mercy throws a light upon his face. What though the thunder-cloud bears down heavily over the sky, and the leaves quake with their visible terror, and thunder begins to mutter in the far-away heavens. Here is a voice of God gentler than the thunder, and it speaks of trust, and hope, and peace.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHAT a storm!" exclaimed Mr. Ford.

He has just sought refuge dripping from the thunder-storm, and now with the rain streaming from his hat, which he holds in his hand, and his white neckcloth sunk in melancholy ruin, laughs and turns very red, and shakes hands with Mrs. Melville as he enters the parlour.

The family group has been slightly dis-

composed by the storm. Mrs. Melville, who does not fear to confess a great awe of the thunder, sits in the corner of the sofa, her work laid by, and her eyes turned to the window, watching for the flash from which she shrinks when it comes. Not far from her mother sits Isabella, not working much, though she holds another baby's robe in her hands, and puts in a stitch now and then, when there is a longer than usual interval between the lightning and the thunder. Esther Greenlees is standing by the window, her head held a little forward, her lips apart, her finger upon her pulse, reckoning, after an old childish fashion, how far the thunder is distant. Now and then Mrs. Melville calls to her:

"Esther, my dear, that is a dangerous place; come here beside me."

And Esther says:

"Yes, aunt;" but nevertheless stands still.

Her cousin Hugh sits near her, looking somewhat grave. Beside him lie some medical books, which they have all been laughing at him for resuming so close a study of; but he is not reading—for Hugh's mind is at present moved with solemn musings. All his days which went before, look slight and boyish; now he feels himself standing between the two wonderful presences, life and death, and there is an awe in his soul, to which the contending elements strike an accordant key.

And in the other corner, beside the window John Aikman sits, curved in his chair, looking at the pretty copy of Rogers, his present to Isabella, and wondering what she thinks of it; whether she has read it, and

if the name of Rogers has gained an additional attraction to her, as it has to him by this book, which forms a kind of unconscious link between them.

"Mr. Aikman, that is the worst place you could sit, between the window and the fireplace," says Mrs. Melville; but Aikman only smiles and keeps his seat.

Filling the apartment with a wet vapour, and distributing through it a succession of little canals, till the parlour becomes like a Dutch town, Mr. Ford shakes hands all round; but where to put the arm-chair for him is no easy question; and it is only settled at last, by removing the square table, and placing the minister in the dark corner beside Mrs. Melville.

"A dreadful storm! Had we lived in the old superstitious times, Mr. Hugh," said Mr.

Ford, "we should have associated these signs in the heavens with this fever, which I am sure is a plague, as fatal as those we read of. It spreads fearfully."

"I believe so," said Hugh, with some constraint.

"Is it infectious, then?" said Mrs. Melville, anxiously. "I heard our little Jane say, her aunt died of the fever; and you were so good as to visit her, Mr. Ford. It is a great trial of courage; but I suppose the disease prevails almost entirely in the lower parts of the town."

"Lots of it about my office," said John Aikman.

Both mother and daughter looked up with a slight start.

Poor John! a flush of intense gratification flew up once more to the edge of his fair

hair. To recover himself, he fixed his eyes on Rogers, and went on, still further to excite the solicitude which he had already awakened.

"Just behind where I have my office, there's a quantity of little miserable streets. I can see into one of the courts out of a back window I have; and indeed one cannot wonder that the poor famished creatures die—as soon as they are able, I was about to say—at least have no strength to resist a malignant disease. For the sake of their own offices just overlooking all this, if for nothing less selfish, our mercantile people should see to it."

"Ay, all Irish I suppose," said Mr. Ford, who was learned in the geography of these miserable quarters.

"Irish labourers; poor emigrants coming

to sleep for a night, in one of those dens, and sleeping for ever; or carrying the germs away with them to poison their ship," said John, with a little excitement; "and all this going on under our eyes—under our windows—where we can see it every day."

"People do not generally observe so closely from windows," said Mr. Ford; "and our great merchants have their time so much occupied, and live out of town for the most part. No doubt some one should take it up; but I am not sure that we should blame *them*."

For Mr. Ford, good man, did not like to blame rich merchants, especially when they found employment for his poor *protégés*.

"People do not observe so closely from windows," repeated Esther Greenlees, "no, indeed; especially from back windows, and

especially people who are short-sighted. I think Mr. Aikman sometimes takes a leap down stairs, aunt."

Deeper and deeper blushed John Aikman; and again Isabella glanced up at him, a brief shy glance; but she did not say a word.

"Oh, I have lots of time," said John, awkwardly; "not to speak of an eye-glass. I get ready all my lessons in the office. Hugh, this thunder has cheated Virgil."

"Are *you* a student, too, Mr. Aikman?" said Mr. Ford, rubbing his hands; "very right, very right; and do I understand that you've begun business? I am delighted to hear it; when you are one of those same great merchants yourself, you'll be more charitable to them. Bye the bye, there's a poor man has been at my house every morning for a week or two: he's out of work,

poor fellow! and not well off, and I am trying to get a place for him—a porter—anything."

"I have a porter," said John; "if I needed two, I should be very glad, Mr. Ford; but I don't, I'm sorry; I'm only beginning, and in a very small way; learning lessons and watching at windows don't agree with much business."

"Well, Mr. Hugh," said the minister, "I must ask for your assistance; your house employs a great many men; with your help my man would soon find a place."

"My help? ah! but I only write letters," said Hugh with a smile, "I have influence over nothing but a black ruler, a single pen, and some of the junior clerks; and the poor boys have as little power as the ruler has; indeed I can do nothing."

"We have a proverb in our part of the country," said Mr. Ford, "that 'there's nae trust like trial.' Try, Mr. Hugh; speak to your warehouseman, or I'll come down and call on you, if you'll introduce me to that functionary. The warehouseman is more important than the master, some of my porter friends tell me. Try the warehouseman, Mr. Hugh."

"You have a great number of porter friends, Mr. Ford," said Mrs. Melville.

"Yes, I am glad to say I embrace a pretty wide range," said the good minister with a complacent smile. "From Mr. Goudie down to his porter; and a great way further down than that, Mrs. Melville. Mr. Goudie's porter is an aristocrat in comparison with some of my clients; and lowest down of all, is a swarm of pests, who are constantly besieging

me, for orders to be sent home by the Glasgow steamer, and certificates of all kinds. I think a day's diary of mine, very faithfully chronicled, would be something amusing—though the quantity of wickedness and deception," continued Mr. Ford, smoothing down, with an effort, the corners of his mouth, and looking very solemn, "is quite distressing—quite dreadful."

And so it was; and learned was Mr. Ford in the common lies of the professional beggar. Nevertheless the good man was cheated every day, and his condemnation of the cheat was so often mixed, with a ludicrous susceptibility to the cleverness of the mode of cheating, that his experiences were in reality more amusing than distressing, though they sometimes extracted from himself bursts of fiery indignation.

"But, Mr. Ford, are people doing any thing for this fever?" asked Esther Greenlees; "anything to help—anything to lessen it?"

Mr. Ford's twinkling eye darted an approving glance towards Hugh. No one noticed it except Esther; but with quick interest she observed it, and observed the rising colour which it called forth in Hugh's face.

"Yes, Miss Esther," said the minister emphatically, "the parish and the corporation do what they can; but a great deal of private charity is always called forth in cases of this kind. Some people give very largely; some people—" and Esther's roused and excited attention again saw a significant glance fall upon Hugh; "some people give what is more than money —their personal service, their skill, their

knowledge, and tend the beds from which even nearest relatives flee. I have seen such things; I have seen people quite unaccustomed to scenes like these, go boldly where I only go with trembling; it is a fine thing to see this, Miss Greenlees."

"Do you mean women?" exclaimed Esther breathlessly.

Mr. Ford shook his head.

"No, I do not mean women; I mean—"

The impetuous Esther had suddenly caught at a personal interest in this matter; but excited and breathless as her eagerness made her, she could still see Hugh's lifted finger implying some secret between the minister and himself.

"I mean men—private Christians," continued Mr. Ford with a slight confusion.

"It has always seemed to me the most

painful form of heroism," said Mrs. Melville; "I do not think I ever could do anything like this. No doubt, if one were a separated individual—I mean, having no home duties or ties; but even then—there are few surely, Mr. Ford, very few even of the most miserable, who have not friends of their own, to attend to them much better, so far as the mere attendance goes, than any stranger could."

"There are thousands who have no friends to attend them," said Hugh.

"Do you think so, Hugh? No, my dear, no. It may seem so, indeed; but great affliction will bring out the latent nature—I am sure of it; and as I should be jealous of any one, who interfered between my bairns and me—as I would rather die, than have a stranger watch beside my son's sick-bed, if he

lay on one; so I cannot think, that even in the greatest misery, these natural feelings can be lessened. The friendless, indeed—the utterly friendless—every one has a duty to them."

"You think so, mother—at any risk?" said Hugh.

Mrs. Melville looked with some wonder in his face, and a trace of her morning suspicions returned to her mind.

"Surely, Hugh—at any physical risk; I do not say that moral perils, should be braved even for that."

Hugh did not understand his mother—could not understand her; for there was nothing present to his mind, at all resembling the great shadow which overhung hers.

And Mrs. Melville, who could believe in

Mr. Ford's tales of imposture and deceit—who could comprehend in some degree, the mass of guilt and misery which overflowed the world; but who could neither believe nor understand how love should ever fail; how the mother, be she the sinfullest, unhappiest that ever bore the name, could leave her mother's office to a stranger; how even sin could annul the blessed bonds and necessities of nature; Mrs. Melville cast down her eyes, and said a secret prayer, for entire deliverance to her son.

Her son; for his sake she could have done what giants cannot do; could have endured, laboured, agonized; sleepless, unwearying, in any pain, in any grief, in any misery, through anything, everything—could the mother's soul have travailed for her boy; and they asked *her* to believe that other

mothers were different in heart from this.

But Mrs. Melville could not have been heroic for the world—could by scarcely any process have been shaped into a Sister of Charity, a universal nurse; it was not in her character; and indeed it was hard to persuade her to look upon the general mass, and call it "the poor." The mass separated itself before her kindly eyes—became families, social congregations, neighbourhoods, fathers, mothers, children; and this feeling greatly restrained the enthusiasm of benevolence, though it sprang out of the very kindliness of a genial heart.

"The friendless should help the friendless," said Esther Greenlees, and unseen by any one, the tears had risen under her eyelids; "is that what you said, aunt?

Those who have no ties, who are separated; did you say it was those, who should help the miserable?"

And a sad feeling of desolation struggled in the heart of Esther. No mother, no brother, no one claiming from her the rights of affection, no one binding her by its happy duties—free, alas! free. It was all Esther could do as she repeated the word — the word so miserable in this significance—to keep down the swelling sob.

"It is the duty of every Christian," said Mr. Ford, calming with a placid generality the excited current of Esther's thoughts. "Some, indeed, are especially gifted and qualified for such a work, but it is the duty of all. There are some admirable people connected with Mr. French's congregation—one lady, I particularly recollect just now,

whose exertions among the poor are quite wonderful — Miss Walker. Perhaps you know her, Mrs. Melville?"

"But, Mr. Ford, is she old?" asked Esther, earnestly.

The tears were still trembling in Esther's eyes, and the inquiry was as completely free from sarcasm as ever question was; but Mr. Ford's eyes twinkled, and an indecorous smile gathered about the corners of his mouth.

"Is she old? I am no judge of the age of ladies, Miss Greenlees. She is—she has—yes, attained the age of discretion, I should say; but an admirable person —a most admirable person," said Mr. Ford, coughing, to keep down a malicious tendency to laugh. "I think I shall bid her call upon you, Mrs. Melville. Miss Green-

lees looks as if she were very much disposed to help, in these works of charity."

Esther became a little fluttered. This looked so like an acknowledgment of her desolate, solitary position. Was *she*, then, one of the friendless, who are separated to help those who have no friends?

A comfort this, indeed—a comfort and happy way of well-doing to the mature contented mind; but to the young, alas! not so—not so; and Esther's heart sank within her.

But Isabella looked up wistfully from the work, which now she had resumed; for the thunder was muttering far away in reluctant leave-taking, and through the slowly descending twilight the lightning flashed no more.

Different from Esther's were the thoughts of Isabella; an unconscious reproach and self-pity were in them. "Esther is free to follow works of charity; Esther is free to do good—to serve the stricken; whereas I must labour all day long—labour for daily bread—labour for *her*."

Give them definite form, Isabella. Say the words to your own heart, and your heart will shrink and cast them out. Bring forth the discontented thought into the face of day, and look at it how it seems, when you have clothed it with its natural expression. But Isabella does not do this; people seldom do this who think unjust thoughts. So she looks up wistfully, with a half envy of her cousin, and casts down her eyes again, with an involuntary compassion for herself.

Those strange veiled, hidden worlds of humanity!—mother, daughter, son, cousin, and friend! They were all very dear to each other—constant companions; near in feelings, in sympathies, in disposition; yet no one there did more than faintly guess, what at that moment was nearest to the other's heart.

Mrs. Melville fancied—almost believed—that her son was brooding over some sin, to which he was tempted, or which already had overcome him; while he, good Hugh, was thinking of the blessedness of saving a life! And Esther envied Isabella, and with a swelling heart recounted to herself what she would give—all the world, if it were hers—to have such a certain hold on mother and brother as Isabella had; while Isabella all the time was envying her.

So there was evil in those hearts—evil springing out of their best gifts and virtues.

John Aikman was not remarkable for quick intuitive perceptions. You would have thought that his noticeable qualities lay quite in another direction; but by some singular art-magic, a glimmering of Isabella's secret thoughts came to him as he watched her; and benevolence had never moved John so warmly as now.

The storm was entirely over.

Mrs. Melville began to entertain a great idea, which had flashed into her mind like the lightning; and though at first repulsed, had returned again and again, till it was victorious. She thought she might venture to ask the minister to stay to supper—might indulge for once in the extravagance of

preparing a formal supper for the little party.

"They seem to be enjoying themselves just now, poor things!" said Mrs. Melville to herself, as she withdrew to the kitchen to give sundry orders to Jane; for Mrs. Melville did not see their hearts.

The thunder-storm was just over: the night felt a little chill, and there was a langour of exhaustion—such pleasant exhaustion, as the happy convalescent feels, to whom health is returning, and whose sufferings have terminated—in the quiet hushed air. Mr. Ford and Hugh were talking of something which interested them; they were addressing each other across the nook in which Esther stood, and their talk formed a barrier between her and Isabella, confining her to her place by the

window. She was not sorry—with her hand shading her eyes, that no one might see how wet their lashes were, she looked out upon the colourless heavens, and watched the clouds break, and the calm sky which nothing disturbs, look through between. Yet was the sky far-distant, cold, unknown, but Esther said in her heart: "Oh, that I had wings like a dove"—to go somewhere —into some desert place—to denude herself of even the friendlinesses which are of kin to affection, because she yearned for affection itself—because she pined for being alone, to flee away where she must have utter solitude; — yet it was the natural suggestion of her heart.

Protected by the stream of Mr. Ford's conversation, John Aikman drew near Isabella. Mere benevolence — a desire to

soothe the painful thought, which he had perceived — nothing else, good people — crimsoned the great stooping forehead of the philanthropic John.

"Is it not time you had put away this work?" he said, with a little awkwardness, which made the approach to familiarity much less alarming, than it would have been in any other case.

"It is not quite dark yet;" said Isabella, and the ghost of a tear twinkled on Isabella's eyelash too; from morning till night, hour by hour, day by day, to work continually, it was not a very bright fate.

"Come, give it to me;" continued John, laying his hand upon the work — that great hand! heaps of the snowy muslin disappeared within its shadow in a moment; —drawing back shyly, Isabella yielded.

Having got it, he did not know well what to do with it—the awkward good fellow—so he blushed scarlet, and laid it on the table, putting his arm round it as a guard.

"I don't see why we should not sometimes have a walk;" said John, growing more and more embarrassed, "in these delightful summer evenings. I used to think, in winter there was no place like this seat here, by the fire-side, but it seems to me I could think Hugh's Mount Vision very fine, if you would come out sometimes; I am sure we need it, shut up all day in our offices — and I am sure so do you."

Isabella was quite taken by surprise; it was not an orderly formal scientific attack, it was a sudden sally—a surprise by night, when

the sentinels were sleeping. She retreated into herself with expedition — drew her chair a little farther away, and said something very indistinctly about having a great deal to do.

"And doing it with this thing — this thing—how do you get it on;" said John, poising Isabella's thimble on the point of his little finger, which it was greatly too small to fit, "I should have thought this was Cinderella's *finger hat,* if I had found it in the street. It would have been a capital present for the young prince."

And John put his arm more closely round the muslin, and held up the thimble between his eye and the light, to examine its small proportions, with half a mind to put it into his waistcoat-pocket, when he was done. Not from any such motive,

of course, as that which would have made it valuable to Cinderella's prince—by no means—only for a trick.

"Esther has got into a corner by herself;" said Isabella, "I am afraid she is becoming sad—she does sometimes now—so if you will not let me work, Mr. Aikman, I must go and bring Esther."

"Ah! you young ladies, what a restless generation you are;" said John, looking annoyed, "I suppose I have done something wrong—have I? and is that why you go away?"

"No, no, indeed. I am only going for Esther." Isabella rose with not a shadow of displeasure remaining in her face.

"It is very well to be Esther;" said John Aikman, slowly. "I mean—I beg Miss Greenlees' pardon — but of course if

you sit working in the house all day, it is quite natural you should be sad. We must not permit it, I see. I shall have to make a speech when I come up to-morrow night."

Isabella did not wait to listen any longer; but, passing behind Hugh's chair, hastened to Esther. Esther was still looking at the clouds, and still her heart was very heavy.

But Isabella put her arm round her softly, and drew her away to sing; and the cloud lightened over them all, and passed from their sky, to trouble them no more until its time; while Isabella at night remembered John Aikman's words, with a flutter of heart by no means disagreeable, and John laughed within himself as, in imagination, he again saw the little silver

thimble perched on his finger's end—Cinderella's thimble — and John wondered whether Cinderella had red hair.

CHAPTER XV.

"AUNT, this is from my Uncle Quentin," said Esther Greenlees.

The letter was a stiff letter enclosing something, and, when it was opened, a couple of shining cards fell to the ground.

"Mr. Quentin Greenlees—Mrs. Quentin Greenlees!" exclaimed Esther, clapping her hands: "Oh aunt, aunt! if he hasn't got himself married!"

"Wait a minute, my dear; wait till I read my letter," said Mrs. Melville, retreating to the sofa.

But Esther could not by any means wait a minute. She went away, running up stairs and calling loudly: "Isabella, Isabella, here's a Mrs. Quentin Greenlees; somebody has married my uncle!"

And Mrs. Melville composed herself to read her letter.

"My dear Isabella,

"I am married. The ceremony took place last Tuesday, and I think I have made a very sensible choice. You will tell Esther—for I suppose you have been too long away to remember the name—that Mrs. Greenlees was Miss Martha Masterton, and that her new aunt is very sensible of her

niece's deficiencies, and prepared to exercise salutary discipline upon her when she returns to Perthshire, as I suppose she eventually will.

"This wild girl I am afraid must be a considerable burden on you, but George has really made a very absurd marriage, and it is quite as well that Esther should be away. Mrs. Greenlees (mine) has a multitude of nieces and nephews, and a most liberal appetite for that commodity. I think, bye and bye, you may send the two girls down to visit us for a few weeks. Send them when it is time for the moors, and if they bring down a brace of Perthshire gentles I shall not forbid the sport; at all events it will be a little change for them, and do Isabella good. At least so Mrs. Greenlees tells me.

"Yourself and Hugh we should be glad to see too; but, as it would not be suitable for my nephew to ask leave of absence so soon, this must be put off till next year. I shall write you again before I think it necessary the girls should come, and don't trouble yourself about their dress—this also from Mrs. Greenlees.

"George has made a fool of himself in every way; the woman is a vulgar person who knows only how to be extravagant, and you will understand how much this satisfies George. My wife sends some kind messages to you all, which are rather too lengthy for me to transmit: understand them without giving me the trouble.

"Yours affectionately,

"QUENTIN GREENLEES."

"Who is it, aunt? who is it?" exclaimed Esther.

"A Miss Martha Masterton. I suppose Masterton of Minnyhive's daughter; she must be a great deal younger than your uncle Quentin; but just have patience a little, Esther—you shall have the letter to read, if you will give me your word to take no offence"

"Oh, aunt Martha! The Nairns' aunt Martha — the Fairlies' aunt Martha — the Mastertons' aunt Martha—everybody's aunt Martha; but she is Masterton of Minnyhive's sister. I am very glad; will you let me see the letter, aunt?"

But the letter calmed down Esther's spirits not a little. She gave it back to Mrs. Melville without saying a word, and it was silently transferred to Isabella.

"Well, girls," said Mrs. Melville, turning from one to another with a look of astonishment; "I thought you would be greatly pleased. Why do you look so blank after such an invitation?"

"My uncle is very kind. I am sure I should be very glad to see Greenlees," said Isabella; "but I don't much care about the grouse shooting, mother; Esther may have all the sport to herself."

But Esther had crept away to the corner of the sofa, and taken up her work. Proud blushes and sudden paleness went and came upon her face, and her downcast eyes looked larger than usual, because they were full of unshed tears.

"If you do not like it, Esther, my dear, you shall not go," said Mrs. Melville, sitting

down beside her, and laying her hand kindly on her shoulder.

There was a brief struggle, and then Esther threw away her work, and indulged herself in a hearty fit of crying.

"My dear, you promised not to take offence," said Mrs. Melville, soothingly; "you know very well it is just your uncle's way."

"I don't take offence; I am not angry, aunt—only I think it is true. I am a burden on you," said Esther.

"Nonsense! don't listen to her, mother," said Isabella; "if it is so, I am a burden too. Does my mother ever make any difference between us, Esther?"

"Yes," said Esther, drying her eyes; "if there is anything hard to do, you do it, Isabella. You have been sad for some days,

I have seen it! but my aunt did not tell me that I might share your grief, as well as your pleasure; and I am only your niece. I am not your daughter, aunt."

"My dear, I was not really grieved—only a fancy," murmured Mrs. Melville.

"It was about Hugh!" exclaimed the impetuous Esther. "But I—I would do nothing like that. I would doubt all the world sooner than Hugh, and wherever he goes, he goes to do good. I know it, I am sure of it!"

Mrs. Melville did not say anything; but her hand fell kindly upon the head lifted up to her with that eager believing look, and with a slight emphatic gesture, she drew the girl's cheek for a moment to her breast.

"Then, Esther, be content, and come and

work at this," said Isabella. "You shall have the hardest work to-day, to please you, and then we must think of the visit to Greenlees — I mean to Uncle Quentin's place ; but I always call it Greenlees."

"It is Fernwood—it is a green, mossy place: you will like it, Isabella," said Esther, only half satisfied ; "but the brace of Perthshire gentles. Oh, aunt, is it not very hard? we cannot do anything; people think we are fit for nothing but to be married!"

"Well, my dear?" said Mrs. Melville.

"Well, aunt!—we are to go down and shoot, as the men shoot game. To make a profession of it; to do this to provide for ourselves. Oh, aunt, it is enough to kill one—the humiliation, the shame!"

"Your Uncle Quentin meant you no humiliation, Esther," said Mrs. Melville

"and don't shoot, my dear, if you have so much objection to it; but as men are animals superior to grouse, the sport should be better, you know. Now, Esther, do not cry."

But Esther did cry still a little—for it was true, alas! and the poor girl perceived what her uncle meant, with self-abasement and shame. This was the natural and proper way of providing for herself; for this purpose he would benevolently afford her an opportunity of entering the hunting-ground. Poor Esther! with no home to seek a natural refuge in, her friends expected her to achieve, by such exertions, a home of her own.

And this idea, when it is realized, is infinitely humiliating to a high-spirited young woman. It cost poor Esther many tears.

The invitation was not much relished by either of them; for though Isabella bye and bye began to laugh at the grouse shooting, her watchful mother very readily perceived, that to leave home was not quite a delightful prospect to Isabella. Uncle Quentin's invitation was not well timed.

CHAPTER XVI.

"This is not Virgil's night—let us have a walk, all of us," said John Aikman.

But the tray was still on the table—so was the white table-cloth—the solitary knife and fork—though it was now seven o'clock.

"Hugh has not returned yet," said Isabella.

And Isabella forgot to think of John Aikman—forgot to observe the disappoint-

ment, with which he received her evasion—the blush with which he urged her mother to advise this walk; for John's looks and words were just beginning to have interest for Isabella, whereas the solicitudes of her whole life had been centred in Hugh.

Where was Hugh? In her very soul his mother trembled as she asked herself the question; and her imagination answered it by vague fancies of unknown dissipation and sin —sin which, in its indefinite horror, appalled her more than any reality could have done.

But at this moment Hugh was hastening home—hurrying from another childish sick-bed. Every step he had taken in his course since he began, had disclosed to him new miseries. In this case, there was nothing particularly miserable in the circumstances of the family, whose house the disease

had entered. The man was a porter, earning a guinea a week; but his wife was thrifty, and it sufficed them. Only if she had not heard that this young doctor attended Mrs. Wood "for nothing," there would have been no medical advice sought for this child; and after he visited it, the mother—panic and callousness contending in her face—assured him with mock resignation, that "if it was the Lord's time to take it, she was sure it would be far better for the child, than staying with her,"—and Hugh having done what he could, left the house in disgust.

It shocked him more than misery—more than sin—more than the brief tears of sister and friends for the poor lost Annie. *She* had lightly regarded the natural affection, which at last became weakened and forsook

her, but this poor child continually cried "mother, mother,"—its sole articulate appeal —while the mother almost desired the ending of its little life.

"Here is Hugh!"

It is only a few minutes after seven—not yet very late—and Mrs. Melville's heart is relieved; but she does not ask him what has detained him now, for she begins to fear the blush which rises to his face, and the excuses in which he sometimes falters. So opening the door to him herself, and receiving him with a tender smile of welcome, which makes Hugh wonder, the mother herself attends him at dinner, and sits beside him while he eats. He does not know what this means, poor fellow—does not know, and it is well—for his firmness would break down altogether, if he could

discern that these are simple artifices of affection, to make him feel how precious he is, and to charm him the more to his home.

His home—this home which he so little needs any art to charm him to; but Hugh, unaware of his mother's purpose, feels unconsciously soothed and comforted by her manner, and looks cheerfully round on the little circle, which he guards as he thinks by his silence, though not even for them can he debar himself from his heaven appointed work. They are all in good spirits, for Esther has recovered the grouse shooting, and Isabella cannot help being considerably pleased with the prospect of the walk. Mrs. Melville likes it too, though it will leave her alone for some time; and John Aikman is almost inclined

to emulate uncle Quentin in his many cups of tea.

"Put on your new bonnet, Isabella," said Mrs. Melville, in a whisper.

And Isabella put on her new bonnet: it was a straw one, with a plain white ribbon, which still did not perfectly satisfy John Aikman. She had not much colour in her cheeks. John fancied there should be something brighter, to correspond with the hue of that red hair.

For the red hair had insensibly stolen into John's favour; he liked it, though he laughed at it; and he was not quite pleased with this white ribbon; but Hugh, though he had been consulted on the matter, and knew, moreover—had been told at least—that nothing but white would do for their mourning, never once noticed the sisterly similarity of the

other white ribbon at his side. He thought Esther was looking very well, better than usual even; and it seemed to Hugh that there was a good deal implied in that.

Mrs. Melville stood at the window, and watched them go away. Future changes were beginning to shadow themselves forth before her eyes; they pleased her, and yet they made her sad.

The little party walked on all together for some time, Isabella not liking to fall back for a separate talk, though John looked a little annoyed and disappointed, and Esther was eager and restive, by no means thinking it necessary to conceal, that she wanted to speak to Hugh.

But gradually they fell into proper order. Hugh Melville, whose arm Esther had grasped with a firm hand, went on at a

quicker pace; while John Aikman, feeling himself supremely awkward, and becoming quite ashamed of his great shoulders, followed with Isabella.

But the conversation of these last two was by no means particularly interesting. For good John did not know what to say; and being especially desirous to make a good appearance, made a very bad one; said stupid things, and irrelevant things, and blushed and stammered, and would fain have run away, much though he had desired this walk. Isabella quite agreed with him—it was a failure.

"Hugh," said Esther, looking with innocent, frank, trustful eyes into her cousin's face; "my aunt is very anxious, I know, about what it is which keeps you out in the evening. Can you tell her, Hugh? or

if you cannot tell her, will you trust me?"

It did not occur to Esther that she had no possible claim to a confidence, which Hugh could not give to his mother. With the utmost innocence, and without a shadow of embarrassment, she lifted her eyes to his, and repeated her question.

"*Is* my mother anxious?" asked Hugh, eagerly. "I did not know that, Esther. What does she think, I wonder?"

"She thinks—she fears—that is to say, Hugh, she does not know at all, and cannot guess, and, therefore, frightens herself with wondering; so does Isabella, and so did I till last night."

"And what happened last night to reassure you?" said Hugh.

Hugh looked considerably pleased.

"I saw Mr. Ford look at you; and I saw you look at Mr. Ford;" said Esther, triumphantly.

"A momentous exchange of glances!—but what light did that throw on the subject, cousin of mine?"

"You need not laugh at me, Hugh; I know what it meant very well. It meant that Mr. Ford knew what you were doing, and that you were doing good; and so I told my aunt."

"Did you? and did my mother really suspect me, Esther? How strange it seems!"

"But, Hugh, it is not strange. My aunt and Isabella think of no one but you; —but it *is* strange that you should stay away at night, away from home, where you know we are all wearying for you, Hugh."

"Very well! weary for me, Esther!" said Hugh, with a glance, under which Esther's eyes fell. "I shall like to think you do; but, nevertheless, I must still be away sometimes, and I cannot tell you what I am doing. This I can tell you, however, Esther—neither my mother nor you would blush to see how I am employed: mind that—and I will tell you bye and bye how it is; if—"

Hugh paused: If— for who could preserve him from the contagion, which was fatal to so many?

"If!" said his cousin. "Oh, Hugh, I am afraid—I am afraid it is something about this fever."

"Hush!" said Hugh, quietly. "You will remember what I have told you, Esther, to justify myself in your eyes; but you must

not say anything to my mother; I will tell her the whole when the time comes. And so you are going to Perthshire, to see uncle Quentin's new wife?"

"I suppose so;" said Esther, indifferently, "but neither Isabella nor I care about it: it is better to be here than at Greenlees."

"Do you think so?" said Hugh, with a bright smile, "and we shall miss you greatly when you are away."

"Ah! yes, you will miss Isabella;" said Esther, slightly sighing.

But the next moment, with a deep blush, she had turned to look for Isabella, for now they had reached Hugh's Mount of Vision, and it was proper to make a pause and contemplate the view. But the view came quite inopportunely; for John Aikman and his companion, having been silent for

some minutes, had just hit upon an agreeable vein of talk, and here they were thrown back upon themselves once more.

CHAPTER XVII.

Mr. Renshaw is sitting comfortably in his private room. It is a very bright July day; and the sun finding its way through the dusty windows, throws in penetrating clear-sighted rays, which pierce indefatigably into the cobwebbed corners, and reveal, without compunction, the short-comings of Mrs. Sweeper, who "does" the office every morning.

Mr. Renshaw has some taste for art. He

is just contemplating a fine picture, which has newly arrived, and which he will carry triumphantly home with him in his carriage to-night. It is only very lately that he has begun to buy pictures, and just now the excitement is strong upon him.

And Mr. Renshaw also contemplates the necessary yearly visit to his "Place" in the country, without which Mrs. Renshaw and the Misses Renshaw could not manage to exist, and which he himself feels that he needs. That he needs! But those soft, ample folds of Mr. Renshaw's capacious waistcoat, and Mr. Renshaw's firm step and unwrinkled face, give little support to the plea of necessity: nevertheless, it is a matter of prudence and needful duty, Mr. Renshaw says, that he should have a few weeks relaxation in his "Place."

And all Mr. Renshaw's subscriptions are paid, and not a farthing of debt stands between him and the skies—those skies which bend approvingly over him, and which sometimes at night he condescends to admire. He has no "little accounts," this irreproachable merchant, and he has a great balance at his banker's. The mammon of unrighteousness has made him friends—the charitable societies write his name upon their lists in letters of gold. Within his breast his heart lies silent, saying no words to him by night or day, and his conscience is as quiet as his heart.

The door opens slowly; it is Hugh Melville, with some letters to be signed. Mr. Renshaw addresses him shortly, you perceive —not discourteously by any means—but in a clear, business-like tone, as of a master to a

servant; for Hugh's *prestige*, as the Nabob's nephew, has considerably faded; and now he is only Mr. Renshaw's corresponding clerk.

But the letters are signed, the business done, and yet he lingers.

"I have intended to speak to you for some days, Sir," said Hugh with a little hesitation. "I have had occasion, once or twice lately, to see a poor woman in whom you may perhaps be interested—the mother of poor Wood."

"Well," said Mr. Renshaw.

"She is very poor, and a widow; one of her children has had the fever, and is only now recovering; and they are entirely dependent, upon what she can make by sewing—since their great misfortune. She has three helpless children, Mr. Renshaw."

"Well?" repeated the merchant sharply.

Hugh was not a good beggar; he thought his prayer might have been understood by implication.

"I thought you might, perhaps, be disposed to help her, Sir," said Hugh with embarrassment.

"I? upon my word, Mr. Melville, you give me credit for an extent of charity which I cannot boast of."

"I am aware her son wronged you, Sir," said Hugh; "but she has suffered more from that unhappy occurrence, than any other can. Loss of means, loss of character, loss of household content and happiness; and she is very poor."

"It may be so, it may be so," said the merchant, waving his hands with some impatience; "but I never give charity except to deserving persons. Imprudence,

recklessness, improvidence — all these must have been for some time in existence before they displayed themselves in open crime; and for these vices I have no pity to spare, Mr. Melville; I cannot suffer them."

"No," said Hugh, unconsciously aloud, "it is only God who suffers all."

"What did you say?" asked Mr. Renshaw, angrily.

"I said—I beg your pardon, Sir—it is only God who bears all, suffers all; from whose charity no crime shuts out the miserable; who has pity to spare for the saddest sinner."

"Mr. Melville, I do not choose to have my servants passing strictures on my conduct; at least in my own presence," said Mr. Renshaw; "your letters are signed; be so good as to leave me."

Hugh went away without another word.

A momentary fear struck him that he might have injured himself, but a little reflection sufficed to show him that this was a needless fear. For such an offence Mr. Renshaw could not discharge him, and hopes of rising in the office, or perhaps becoming some time a merchant himself, had already faded from his mind; for his course was very clearly shaping itself before him, and he knew, that he never could feel himself in anything, but an uneasy probationary state, until he was thoroughly qualified to practice his profession.

So Hugh returned to his desk and to his labour. The clerkish conversation of the office was not particularly delightful to him in any state of mind, and even less than usual did it please him to-day; but in the afternoon he had a visitor, whose entrance

created a little sensation among the youths of Mr. Renshaw's counting-house. With a resplendent white neckcloth, a face radiant with the blandest smiles, and himself big enough to have put two or three of them in his pockets—it was Mr. Ford.

"It is for an introduction to your warehouseman, Mr. Hugh," said the minister under his breath. "I expect he will prove a valuable acquaintance to me; a decent man I hear, and attentive to the means of grace—so I should be glad to have an introduction to him. This poor man of mine persecutes me—comes every morning as regularly as breakfast comes; poor fellow! I should not say persecutes, but now and then it becomes troublesome, you know."

"But you know Mr. Renshaw yourself, Mr. Ford," said Hugh.

"Ah, yes; but Mr. Renshaw himself is not the man. It doesn't answer so well, Mr. Melville. These merchants—one only bothers them, and they have a multitude of things to think of—how am I to expect Mr. Goudie, or Mr. Renshaw, among their great transactions to recollect a man earning a guinea a-week? whereas, the warehouse-man is pleased to be asked for his patronage. Ah, human nature, human nature; but one is justified in taking innocent advantage of it, Mr. Hugh."

"And there is Mr. Melrose; he employs multitudes of men," said Hugh.

"So he does, so he does; but some way, the men prefer anything rather than Mr. Melrose's employment. He's a good man himself; gives quite magnificent donations sometimes, but very little wages—exceed-

ingly little wages, it must be acknowledged. Why, you would not believe it, I daresay; but the people think even the police better than Mr. Melrose's."

"Well, I don't much know the warehouseman," said Hugh, getting his hat, and whispering an explanation to the chief clerk; "but you will not need much introduction, Mr. Ford, and I believe he is an honest fellow."

"A valuable acquaintance," said Mr. Ford smiling; "I always cultivate such people when I can: superintendants of police, foremen in works, everybody who can get employment. It is very necessary for a minister in a poor district like ours, Mr. Hugh."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"You surely cannot think of leaving the house just now, when the child is so ill," said Hugh Melville.

"I won't be long, Sir," answered the callous mother of the dying infant. "Bless you, there's Sarah Jane can nurse little Willie as well as me."

"But are you not afraid to expose her to the infection," asked Hugh rather sternly.

"Well, doctor, as well her as me. I've got to work for my little family, doctor; it's a sad thing for children when the mother's taken, but when it's just themselves, poor things, eh! isn't it a blessing. I'm sure I've heard folk say, many's the time, that they never cried at a child's burying; for isn't it the happiest thing that could happen for the poor little creatures, when they're young, and sure to get to heaven?"

"That is not the question for us," said Hugh, authoritatively; "our concern is to cherish and preserve as long as possible the life which God has entrusted to us. If it pleases God to resume it, that is His will, and we must submit, but if negligence of ours cuts it short by an hour, woe to us! Do you know that this poor infant may die before you return?"

"I'm only going to pay up the money into the child's club. I won't be twenty minutes, Sir," said the woman, hurrying away.

"Where has your mother gone to?" asked Hugh, as he went into the small bedroom where a little girl sat beside the sick child.

"Please, she's gone to pay up little Willie's money; it's into the burying club, Sir," said Sarah Jane, beginning to cry; "and mother said she might as well have it when she's been paying so long; poor little Willie! he's sleeping now—oh, doctor! do you think he'll die?"

Hugh stood beside the bed trembling with indignation and disgust. The child lay with its hand under its cheek in a disturbed uneasy sleep; and already the little features

were fixing into that ghastly expression, pinched and rigid, which is the premonition of death. This very small apartment is in the third story of the house, looking northward, and one long slanting line of sunshine strays into a corner of the room. The bed is very small, bare, and uncurtained, but some childish hands have pinned up rude coloured "pictures" on the wall, and a few poor toys, a top, a little whip, and some marbles, lie in the window sill.

"Is there no one in the house but you?" asked the young physician.

"No, Sir; but please mother's only gone down the street, and she won't be long."

"Then I shall wait till she returns," said Hugh, looking at his watch with a sigh—for just now the table would be spread

for him at home, and anxious eyes would be looking for his return; but he could not leave the dying child, with only this other child to tend him.

Sarah Jane ran down stairs to the next floor, which like this only contained one room, and reappeared in a few minutes carrying a chair for Hugh. Having placed it for him, and invited him to sit down, the little girl resumed her own stool by the bedside, and hastily brushing her sleeve over her cheek to remove the lingering tears, took up her work, which was a long black strip of ornamental knitting, and began to labour at it, elaborately counting the stitches for her pattern. Hugh stood by the bed, pondering painfully upon this scene. The little boy was between seven and eight, a fine manful well-grown child, such a one as in

many households would have been the chiefest treasure. Poor little Willie! his brother was playing in the street—his mother was "paying up" the arrears of subscription to his burial society, and calculating what sort of a black bonnet she should buy to herself with the money they would give her on his death—while here by his forsaken sick-bed his sister, the only one in whom natural feeling still existed, sat quietly counting the stitches of her knitting, though his uneasy feverish breathing filled the room with a sensation of pain.

At last the child awoke. From the little face so close to him, and from the serious countenance of Hugh bending over his bed, his eyes wandered towards the sunbeam, now slanting high up on the wall, and to the toys on the window-sill.

"Mother, let me out to play—I want out to play," he murmured, half awake.

"Hush, Willie," said little Sarah Jane.

"Mother, isn't it a beautiful day? you said you'd take us over Cheshire on a beautiful day. Take us now, will you, mother? I'd like to have a sail—I'd like to see the ships. Will you take us, mother, to-day?"

"Mother isn't in—hush, Willie," said the little girl.

"I want my mother, I want my mother," said Willie, beginning to cry feebly. "I want to go out, I want to play. Mother! mother!"

"She will come just now; you must be quiet, my little man, and take your draught. Now Willie, see, there is only a very little," said Hugh.

And Willie, who was very weak and only half-conscious of where he was, and what was going on around him, submitted to swallow the medicine; it was an unnecessary pain for the poor child, for now he was beyond all help.

"Isn't it getting dark, Sally," said the little boy, "I think I'll go to sleep; I think it's bed-time now; and mother will take us all over Cheshire to-morrow, and we'll have a sail. Mother!—mother! won't you come and speak to me."

"Mother's coming, Willie—husht, there's a good boy," said the little girl, going on with her work.

"Then I'll say my prayers. Isn't it soon dark, Sally? I'll get up and say my prayers, and then I'll go to sleep."

Poor little childish dreamer! With an

awe for the approaching end, which appeared so visibly in that small, pinched, white face, Hugh lifted him up, so that he could kneel with his head on the pillow; his little thin arms were folded on it, between them his head sank down feebly—"Our Father which art in Heaven."

The only father, little one! the sole kindred remaining to thee in earth or Heaven! No more sailing upon the blue river, which sparkles under this mortal sun; no more roaming among these earthly fields; no more unconscious, childish wonderings about the marvels of the world. Another day, and in the streets of Jerusalem thy free feet shall be wandering: another hour, and the river of life shall flow before thee with God's smile for sunlight on its waves. On the earth thine own household already in their thoughts

lay the sod over those young failing limbs of thine. Turn to the heavens, poor child, and say, "Our Father," and then to sleep.

But here is a harsh voice breaking through the death-prayer. The little window has been opened—it is the mother who speaks below.

"The child's very bad; I won't say a lie—and I'm sure if the Lord takes him I'll never complain. I've been down to the club, paying up little Willie's money; I've been paying up for all the children, for when once trouble begins in a family, there's no telling when it may end; so I've paid up for them all, whatever happens; and a good bit of money it took."

"It's the fever little Willie's got," said another voice.

"Who said it was the fever? A child may be ill, sure, of many a thing besides the fever."

"I'll tell you what, it's a shame to have it in a decent neighbourhood," retorted the other speaker. "I've given notice, and I'll shift next Monday; for I shouldn't wonder a bit, not I, if every soul in the court was to take it—it's that catching a thing. Why didn't you send the child to the hospital? there's a fever-shed just at the end of the street."

"Oh, the heartless woman! just hear to her. There isn't a bit of natural feeling in her," exclaimed the mother furiously.

And a loud quarrel ensued—only concluded by the other belligerent retreating, after a long denunciation delivered upon her

"front steps," into her house; and dashing behind her, with a noise like a gun, the front door, which she immediately opened again to renew her speech.

But Sarah Jane had called her mother by this time, and Hugh knew that she was coming, by the loud stream of angry words which gradually advanced up the stairs. Little Willie's prayer was over, so very nearly was his life; and Hugh again had laid him down, and the little mind was wandering among the playthings, it never should see again—fondly speculating on the morrow, which never looks so beautiful and joyous as when it never can return.

The little eyes are dim; they only can perceive that the mother is here, not that her face is flushed with anger—her mind all unmoved by the solemn presence which

broods over this bed; and now suddenly and silently the child is dead!

Poor little Sarah Jane, on her knees by the bedside, buries her face in the coverlet and weeps, but still her knitting is in her hand. Bye and bye she will count her stitches again, till the fever strikes the work out of her powerless fingers too; and a momentary awe overcomes the mother. Little Willie is gone—she cannot say another word to him, if she had the world to give for the power—cannot convey to him the knowledge of one caress—cannot reach him, if she spent her soul in calling. It strikes her dumb, and there fall a few natural tears; but very soon she remembers with satisfaction, that Willie's burial money is secured, and calculates by his age the exact sum she will receive. Poor little Willie! the

mother has forgotten to have compassion upon her child. "Yet will not I forget," thank God!—over the earth the heavens are always shining!

CHAPTER XIX.

"GOING to Scotland!"

What a comical tone and look of dismay John Aikman turned round, away from Mrs. Melville, and made faces at the "Rogers;" what were they going to be about in Scotland?

"My uncle has invited Isabella for the grouse shooting," said the wicked and mischievous Esther, whose own tribulations on

this point were all over long ago. "There used to be a song that Katie Guthrie sang to me, aunt. It was not very pretty, I don't know why I liked it—but I did like it, I remember. It was about a lady, who 'went a hunting with her dog and her gun,' and chose a farmer instead of a squire; and then there was something about a glove, I recollect. Mind, there was neither poetry nor music in it; but it was a story, and some way I never lost my interest in the *dénouement*. Only think, aunt, if Isabella were to do such a thing!"

"As go a hunting with a do-og and a gun?" asked John Aikman, ludicrously imitating the tune which Esther had hummed.

"No, as choosing the young farmer instead of the squire my uncle wants her to have."

Isabella had just entered the room, and

lifting her eyes, met with such a strange, fierce glance, as half terrified her, though it made her laugh. "If you dare," said John Aikman's eyes.

"What was Esther saying?" asked Isabella.

But Esther only laughed; and John, turning very red, withdrew his defiant look, and changed his position; for just now, he noticed that Isabella did not look quite happy, and this had the strangest influence upon him. He never knew himself before to be so sympathetic.

"But my brother seems to have changed his mind," said Mrs. Melville, "about the moors; for he wishes the girls to leave home on Monday. Isabella never has travelled any distance before; nor you, Esther, I suppose, except for your one journey; but they are not to go by sea."

"On Monday!" John leaned his brow on the window, and looked out so moodily, that a baby passing in its mother's arms, straightway began to cry.

"And this is Friday," said Mrs. Melville; "we have very little time to prepare; the house will be dull without them, Mr. Aikman."

Mr. Aikman made no answer. The grass-plot was enlarging under his eyes to a Perthshire glen, the lilac bush making itself into graceful mountain birch and rowan tree; and there was Isabella, her cheek tinted with the freshening breeze which turned over and over, as if in love of it, the hair which John Aikman called red—while the wallflower bushes round the border grew into so many squires, turning with respectful, interested, admiring glances towards humble Isabella Melville. And it suddenly occurred to John,

that he had no right whatever to laugh secretly at her red hair, to call her Tibbie within himself. Not the remotest right; only a simple acquaintance, friend John, to whom the bride of the Perthshire squire may bow, when she passes you in the street, with no more than a smile for the old friendship's sake. And the orange blossoms, John; think you they will become the red-haired bride? but John sets his teeth and looks so fiercely through the window at the retreating baby, that it screams with terror. If only the Perthshire squire were within reach of that strong right hand!

But John Aikman said not a word of regret—not a syllable of consent to Mrs. Melville's anticipation. He was hot and angry with himself; with that squalling baby whose cries gradually die away, quivering with

the compelled locomotion, along the street—with Mrs. Melville, placidly telling him that the house would be dull—and with the mischievous Esther, whose low laugh he can hear in the other corner of the room. But Isabella is silent and out of sight behind him—he is not angry with her.

There is a considerable silence, as regards John at least, though some conversation goes on still between Mrs. Melville and Esther. Hugh is very late to-night; it is nearly eight now, and he has not yet returned; but Mrs. Melville, though she casts wistful glances from the window, and sometimes steals quietly to the door to look for him, seems less unhappily anxious than before. She has been thinking painfully over it all, and when she looks at his character, she cannot believe that he is spend-

ing these hours in sin, and veiling it with falsehood.

And now with a wearied step Hugh is coming up the street; quietly his mother opens the door for him, and her face is grave and wistful, but there is nothing said.

And immediately after, Isabella assumes her place at the tea-table, while John, dropping slowly into the chair which she has left, takes up from the little round stand, which usually carries the writing-desk, but which is now doing duty for a work-table, the thimble she has left there. He perches it on his finger's end again, and looks at it with a half-comic seriousness. In its little round lie enclosed a host of home emblems; the woman's presence; the domestic labours; the daily cares and industries. It opens to

John's newly-awakened imagination a succession of scenes quite different from the Perthshire glen. He suddenly sees all those gentle implements of "woman's work" lie upon a handsomer work-table than this; and the room widens and enlarges—throws out a great bow-window there, and here opens into a noble fire-place; and pictures are on the walls, and those great recesses are rich with friendly books, while the fire-light glimmers pleasantly on the head of some one sitting by the hearth, with this silver thimble on her finger, and red hair catching the gleam of the kindly light. But who is the master of the household, John?

And John looking at the thimble, sighs —and suddenly recollecting himself, blushes; but the Perthshire squire returns to his remembrance, and a fierce light flashes

under his eyelids, and a defiant smile curls upon his lip—all to the infinite amusement of Esther Greenlees, who scarcely can restrain the strong impulse upon her to pull Hugh's sleeve, and bid him look at the meditative face of his friend.

And now he sits silently drinking tea, answering only in monosyllables when they speak to him—pondering—but not pondering either—letting his thoughts wander hither and thither, like so many gazing children; till suddenly a fiery thrill shoots over him, the blood flushes desperately to his face, and John raises himself to the most erect and upright attitude he was ever seen in, and opens his eyes wide. They have all concentrated into a purpose this maze of thoughts, and John Aikman is startled out of his dreaming.

What to do?—very probably not to do anything; for his thoughts have been playing with her red hair so long, and have been deluding themselves with such an affectation of carelessness to it, that the definite conclusion of all this comes upon John like a thunderbolt. To make a serious matter of it. To smile and jest with himself about her, and to call her Tibbie no longer, but fairly confessing to his own heart that there is no such hair in the world, nor anywhere a name like Isabella, to put himself quite humbly like a lamb at her disposal. Poor John! he is exceedingly dubious of *her*; what she will think—how she will answer him; but the most terrible thing is his own ridicule—how is he to bear *that?*

"Is it too late for a walk?" said John, rousing himself with a start.

"Half-past eight; too late to-night, Mr. Aikman," said Mrs. Melville, "and you must excuse the girls, for they have a good deal to do; their preparations must be so hurried."

Excuse the girls! and there they go, Isabella stealing out so much more quietly than usual, while Esther, turning round as she leaves the room, laughs under her breath at John's dismay.

So he fell into a reverie, leaning upon the side of the window, and looking out vacantly into the clouds; for you could see clouds, and quite an extensive range of sky, from Mrs. Melville's window. He was not exactly thinking about anything; he was in a hazy misty excited state, disturbed and full of dreams.

"What ails you, John?" asked Hugh Melville, touching him on the shoulder.

"What ails you, man? you've got something on your mind."

John's fingers were closed upon a small object, which lay buried in his great hand. At this question, which he had a dreamy apprehension of, as having reference to his hand, he opened it mechanically, and looking down upon it with abstracted eyes, made answer: "It's only a thimble."

"Aikman! it's your mind, I'm talking of; the thimble has nothing to do with *it*, I presume. Are you not well, John?"

"Well enough; oh, yes, quite well—only I was thinking of something else;" answered John, with great embarrassment. "I suppose it's too late for any thing now, Hugh?"

"No, I think not; they're busy enough up-stairs, late as it is. Certainly, the room

looks a little blank, when they leave it all to ourselves."

John cast a hurried glance round the little parlour; about its walls, the gathering night was weaving dusky curtains: the work had been put away from the tables, the vacant chairs looked desolate and solitary. A *little* blank! it seemed all blank together to John.

"Mine's worse;" returned Aikman, with emphatic vivacity, "you can fancy they're sitting there, and there, you know; whereas, there never was anybody in my room — I say, Hugh, I'm going away. There is no use staying here to make a fool of one's-self with talk like this."

CHAPTER XX.

"I THOUGHT I would just take a run up to see them off," said John Aikman. "What a beautiful morning; how far are they to travel to-day?"

They are standing at the door of the railway-carriage, superintending the arrangement of some of their smaller parcels, while Mrs. Melville, looking rather pale, stands behind them.

"They will stay all night in Edinburgh—my brother is to meet them," said Mrs. Melville; "it was very kind of you to come, Mr. Aikman. Hugh, you know, is not his own master; he could not get away."

"I thought so," said John; "he should have come to me, Mrs. Melville. I—I took a run up to see you off, Miss Greenlees, knowing that Hugh could not be here."

"But I am coming back again, Mr. Aikman;" said Esther hastily, "did you think I was going to stay in Perthshire? no, indeed—unless we all go."

"I should be very glad, my dear—if Hugh were settled," said Mrs. Melville.

For a strange idea had seized upon the mother's anxious mind. She thought Hugh had formed some engagement, in which

there was nothing blameable but imprudence, and that, while he wanted to marry, he hesitated and feared to tell her of it, lest it should distress her and make her feel herself dependent on him. She had been pondering this for some days, and had been dreaming, with a kind of sick contentment, of some cottage in her native county, where she could live with Isabella and Esther—though to resign Hugh into the hands of a stranger—to believe that he was willing to be so resigned—was more painful to her than she would confess.

Esther made no answer; it was not perhaps, the very best thing, which could have been selected, to exhilarate her for her journey.

And just then, for the first time, Isabella turned round. Leave-takings are always a

little sad, and John Aikman expected that Isabella's face would bear a kindred shadow to his own; but human nature is very perverse and wilful. Upon this group of overcast looks, Isabella turned round.—Alas! poor John!—with a fluttering, joyous, expectant smile, and merry sunbeams glimmering out of the depths of her eyes.

Many influences had combined to lighten Isabella's heart. First, a conversation with Esther this morning, in which was faithfully reported the substance of Esther's conversation with Hugh; then a tearful, affectionate, melancholy half hour with Mrs. Melville, telling her the places she should see, the spots to which she should make pilgrimages; then the beautiful day—the excitement of the long journey—and not least, this sudden appearance of John Aikman.

The conclusion of all was, that Isabella's heart was leaping and dancing a little, pleasantly anticipating the going away, pleasantly looking forward to the return; and believing that a great many fresh, unknown pleasures must lie between. She did not know, that John Aikman would have been greatly better pleased to see her smile, a little, just a little, subdued by melancholy; but if she had known it—Isabella was no angel—we are not quite sure, that this would not have added a certain piquancy to her enjoyment, and made her smile still brighter than before.

And now with smiles and bows, and waving of hands, the train plunges into the gloom of the tunnel, and Mrs. Melville, and John Aikman stand together very quiet and solitary, and look into each other's

faces. It is nothing to those porters, who are shouldering the next line of carriages on to the vacant rails, that these have gone away — nothing to the new crowd which occupies the platform, bound for Manchester and Bolton, and other such nameless places. It is only the "North train" which now rumbles up the tunnel; and all the brisk pigmies swarming about under that high glass roof, look as fresh and busy as if nothing had happened; whereas these two go away quite languid and exhausted, and wonder at the unconcerned unpausing world; for both of them the day has quite spent itself—there is no more use or fragrance in it.

Hugh was not late that night; he felt a prior duty to his mother, and came home as early as he could escape from the office. John Aikman arrived too before tea was

over, and a whole half hour was spent in speculations, as to where *they* would be now, and consultations over the mysterious enigmatical 'Bradshaw,' which the girls, who did not understand it, had left behind them. John Aikman, who has some experience in travelling, delivers a lecture on the 'Bradshaw,' much to the edification of Mrs. Melville, who thinks it is not so very difficult to discover what it means now, when she has been shown the way; but receiving the book into her own hands to make the experiment, is in two minutes, as greatly perplexed as ever, and cannot, by any means, make out when they will arrive at Edinburgh.

When John has left them, and Mrs. Melville and her son are alone together, she makes two or three futile attempts to begin a motherly speech to him about the fancied

engagement, which now she is quite sure of. But the words will never come over her faltering lips. He sits opposite to her looking so well—looking so contented with his home—speaking so much and tenderly of the girls—that Mrs. Melville at last puts away her hypothesis, resolving to say nothing about it at present, and persuading herself that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

But next morning after breakfast, just as he is going away to business, Hugh turns back to speak to her.

"Do not be anxious if I am late to-night, mother. I fear I shall be detained to-night."

"Very well, Hugh."

And so he went away. Mrs. Melville took up her sewing, and laid it down again —strayed listlessly about the room—put up

a book or two which had been displaced, brushed the dust from the corners of the old piano; and sitting down again, in her solitude, wept a few quiet tears, and prayed in her heart.

The sunshine is bright without, and there is a fresh soft breeze, which plays among the branches of the lilac-bush, and stirs the tall, weak pinks in the little flower-plot. Mrs. Melville opens the door, to look at them, and tie up those which have fallen from their prop, and the sweet air refreshes her. She is better when she returns to the parlour, and resumes her "seam."

And now again it is evening; out of this court, where little Willie died, they are removing some one to the infirmary—to the temporary infirmary, which has been hastily fitted up in that great extent of low-roofed warehouses, not far away—only

at the end of the street. The hospitals are all full, and round some of them are ghastly places, "fever-sheds," hastily erected to meet the exigency; the place here has substantial walls, and a good sheltering roof, but still is only the fever-shed—and this poor creature will die, among the hundreds who are daily dying there.

It is little Willie's mother. She too is in a burial society, and her strong-constitutioned husband will be rich, with the money he gets from all these deaths. It is an immense comfort to him this consideration, and with what measure she had meted, it has been measured to her again. A miserable tragedy—yet the case is so common that it scarcely deserves to be distinguished by special comment.

Into a more degraded place than this—a little filthy court forming a passage be-

tween two miserable streets, Hugh Melville has gone on his errand of mercy. From each of those streets you enter by a narrow covered doorway, and the court widens within to a little area of two yards broad, with a stream of dirty water flowing through a channel in the middle. Only one step up from the flags is the door of this house, and you enter at once into a small paved room, with a window one half glass, and one half paper, under which stands a deal table, and a few wooden chairs and stools furnish the remainder of the apartment, together with a crazy old sofa, so called, which is a bed by night, and serves all kind of purposes by day. But wretched as the room is, a drapery of blue and white check has been, of old, festooned above the window, and heavy with dust still hangs there, mocking the misery under it with its attempted ornament.

The sofa, a hard wooden settle, has once been covered with the same check, but torn and patched and stained it retains little resemblance to its original. Upon the high mantel-piece there still stands a solitary brass candlestick; poor Mary Kelly had once a pair of them, the cherished adornments of her mantel-shelf—but one is already in the pawnbroker's, whose back-door is so invitingly near—and the other will follow it to-night.

For Dennis has taken the fever; poor Irish Dennis, he is a strong fellow! they can get a great deal of work out of him; and if there are wild passions in his heart, and if he sometimes flourishes that brawny arm of his, and perhaps threatens—perhaps actually does knock down some one who comes in his way, there is little use for being horrified, good prosperous people.

Dennis has a wife and six children, inheriting not half their father's vigorous proportions, it is true, but with the appetites of tigers in their little stunted forms—and to keep all these, poor Dennis, working in the great sugar-house, has fifteen weekly shillings. Fifteen shillings! "The master," at the sugar-house is a very good man, and a very rich man, magnificent in his benevolences and able to be magnificent; but he pays Dennis majestically, and has not a twinge in his comfortable conscience whispering to him of injustice. Why? because he could find a thousand other Dennises—a multitude of Johns and Duncans—all thinking fifteen shillings superior to nothing—half a loaf better than no bread; and the rich merchant knows no wrong in taking advantage of this bitter need—is aware of no justice higher than the laws of supply and

demand—and feels no individual guilt or responsibility in paying to his labourer what his labourer cannot live on, and himself growing rich on the profits of this unrewarded toil.

But even the fifteen shillings drops now, and poor Dennis is raving in the fever. Very true the house is not clean—the children are unkempt, unwashed, unrestrained—but it is hard to live on fifteen shillings a-week; very hard—on fifteen pounds "the master," would think his two fair children very poor; and here there are six youthful lives for the training, eight souls under this roof.

A group of neighbours stand about the entrance to the court. One of them is a wild, vivacious-looking woman, with black elf-locks straying out under her cap, and a face looking so alert and odd, that if she were but a little richer and a little cleaner, there

would be something quite attractive about her, though she is no longer young. As Hugh leaves the sad sick bed of his last new patient, he is caught in this ring.

"Is it the fever, doctor? bless you, tell us, doctor dear."

"My boy's in the sugar house too—eh! it's dreadful hard living off that sugar-house," said the vivacious face; "only nine shilling a-week, and him as much a man as he'll ever be—eighteen year old, doctor, and a strong lad. We'd have starved many a time, if it had'nt been for the cart and the donkey; and what that creature's to do with them childer it's more than I can tell—Oh, doctor, is it the fever?"

"It is certainly the fever," said Hugh.

"And is it as catching as they say?

Can't they take him to the fever-shed? but maybe he would'nt have his priest there, and them Romans can't think to die comfortable without a priest: but how in all the earth is that poor woman ever to do, that has'nt got no donkey or cart like me, with all them childer?"

"They'll have to go on the parish," suggested one of the women.

"And that's all you know: the parish won't have nothing to do with her—Oh, don't you think I found out all that, when Johnson died and left me with five on them? and, doctor, is it you goes where young Angus Mackay the Scotch police-man, is lying? eh, he's a handsome young fellow that is, to be a policeman! and them brutes at the parish office put him on duty about the fever-shed. So he's took bad of course, and ne'er a one would stay in

the house with him, but a nurse the parish got. Eh, they are bad ones, them folks at the parish office! But I never was beholden to them, and would'nt—not if they'd give me all the bank."

Hugh gently extricated himself from the little crowd, when a woman suddenly made her appearance, crossing the entrance of the court.

"Eh, Mary Baines!" screamed the spokeswoman of the company, "how's young Angus—is he better?"

"He's had a bad turn. I'm going for the doctor," said the nurse.

"Bless you, here's a doctor!" exclaimed a ready chorus.

"Well, he's all alone, and by himself," answered the woman, "and I'll not get the doctor nearer than the dispensary; if you'll come, Sir, there's the parish to pay."

Finding this backed by the entreaties of all the gossips round him, and curious to see who this young countryman was, who had gained all these suffrages from members of a class, not particularly indulgent to preservers of the public peace, Hugh at length followed the nurse.

She led him into one of the "front houses," a clean, respectable-looking place, of a superior class for the locality; upstairs in a comfortable bed-room lay the patient. He was very quiet, looking more melancholy than ill, for Hugh ascertained from the woman, that the crisis was already past, and that the patient had been pronounced out of danger; only he had "took a bad turn ever since Joseph Thompson called in the forenoon."

Hugh began to talk kindly to the young man. He was a youthful Adonis,

with a fine and somewhat effeminate face, which his illness made strangely delicate in appearance; but except his remarkable good looks, and the fine six-foot person which captivated his clients, young Angus Mackay did not appear at all a noticeable person. Hugh's kindly tone opened his heart.

"Ye see, there was a man here to-day," said the patient, slowly. "I had a little money when I came here, and I've saved some since; for I'm sergeant now—that's six and twenty shillings a week, doctor, a good wage. There was about fifty pounds of it: so a man advised me to put it into some loan societies, and so I did. Ye see, these societies they grant loans, and there's the borrower and two securities, and if one fails ye can come upon the other; but what do you think,

the man told me this morning, doctor? With this fever, that has no regard for debts, the half of these loan societies are broken, and every one I had money in is clean gone. Well, Sir, I'm not that strong in the mind to take it canny. I wanted to get out of this life, and take a better trade by the hand; but what am I to do when all my siller's lost?"

"And is it sure? is there no way of recovery?" said Hugh.

"Oh! ye see this fever, it has meddled with few rich folk; its' been among the poor; and borrowers are dead, and securities are dead, and where are we to look for the siller? This man Joe says there's no a penny to the fore; every fraction's gone."

There was no necessity for medicine in this case; and some comforting words brought the young man to a kind of rueful

resignation. Glad to escape and hurry home, Hugh left the neighbourhood stealthily, feeling himself thoroughly exhausted, by the scenes he witnessed every night. This last was not less characteristic than the others—nor less appalling; the miserable beings to whom these loans were granted—what nameless multitudes of them must have perished from the earth, before they produced such a result as this.

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